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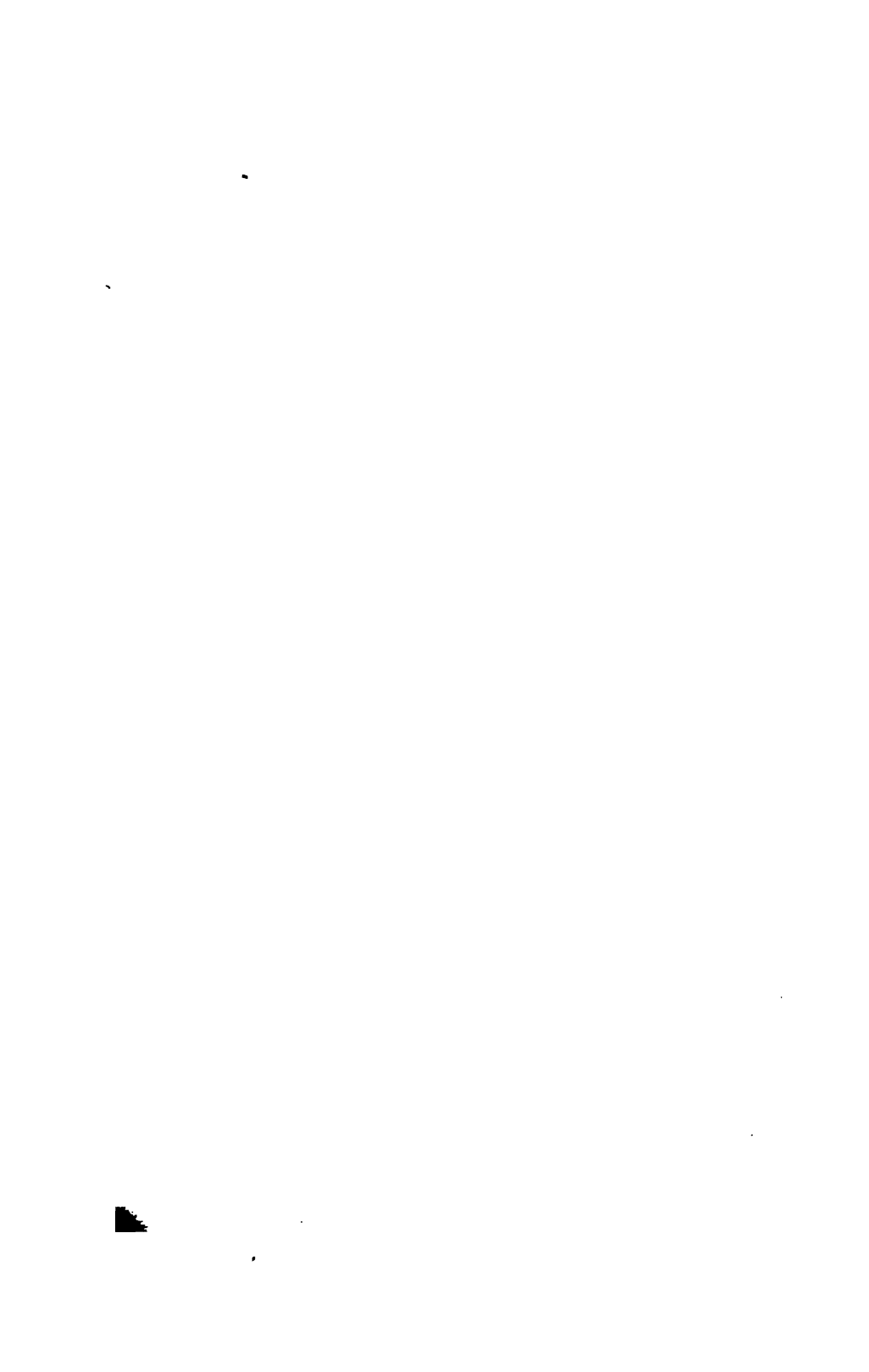


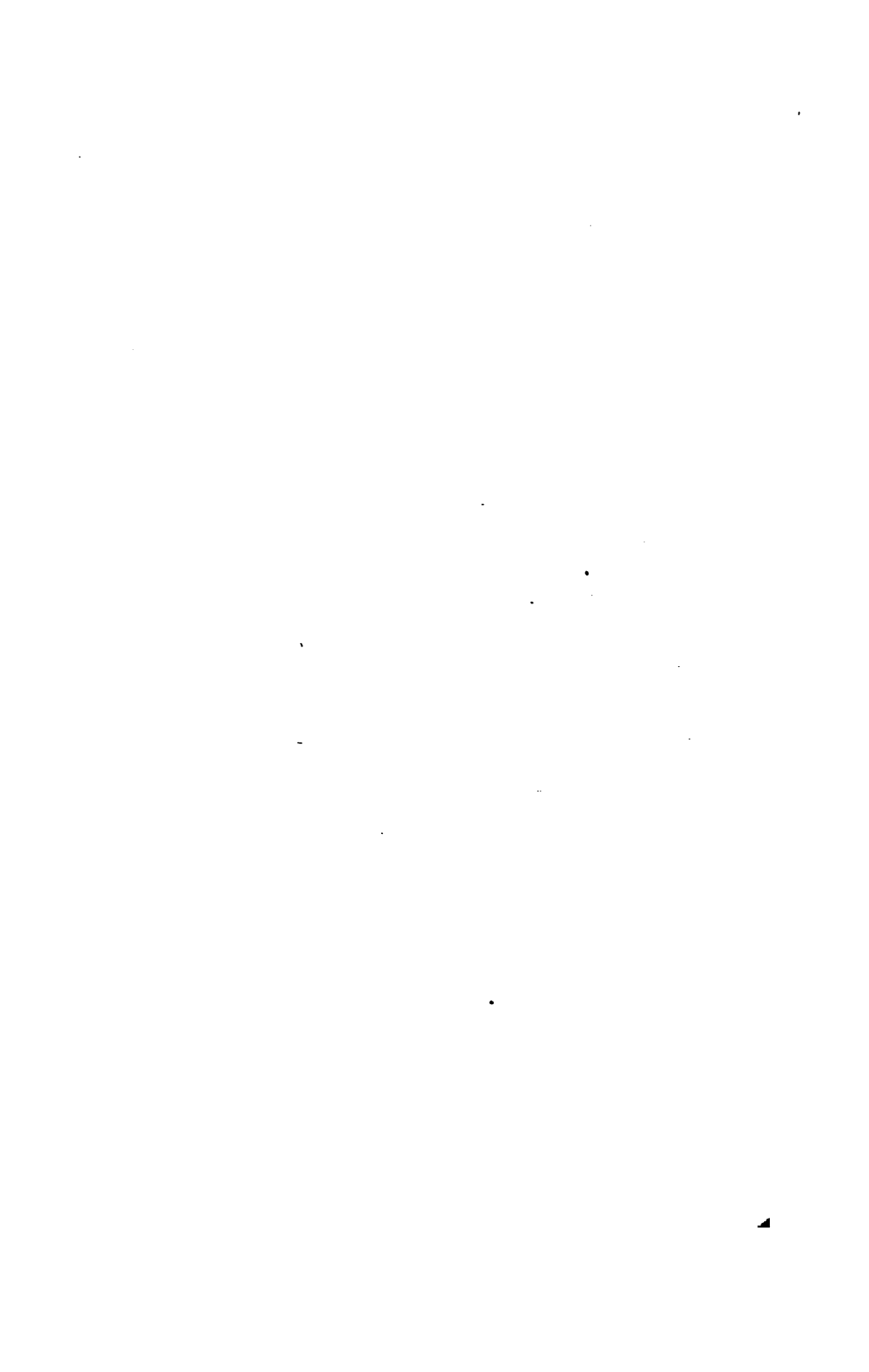














E I G H T
S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

IN THE YEAR MDCCXCI.

AT THE

L E C T U R E

FOUNDED BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M.A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY ROBERT MORRES, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF BRASEN NOSE COLLEGE.

O X F O R D,

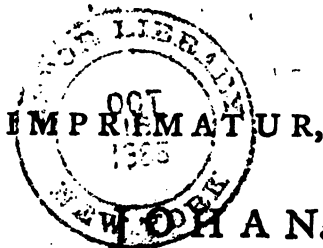
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1791 A.



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JOHAN. COOKE,

Vice-Chan. Oxon.

C.C.C.
Mar. 12. 1791.

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

AND REVEREND

THE HEADS OF COLLEGES,

NEW YORK

PUBLIC

THESE SERMONS,

PREACHED AT THEIR APPOINTMENT

ARE

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

NOY WEN
CLER
YHARD

Extract from the last Will and Testament of the late Reverend JOHN BAMPTON, Canon of Salisbury.

—— “ I give and bequeath my Lands and
“ Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scho-
“ lars of the Univerfity of Oxford for ever, to
“ have and to hold all and fingular the faid
“ Lands or Estates upon trust, and to the in-
“ tents and purpofes hereafter mentioned ; that,
“ is to fay, I will and appoint, that the Vice-
“ Chancellor of the Univerfity of Oxford for
“ the time being fhall take and receive all the
“ rents, iffues, and profits thereof, and (after
“ all reparations, and neceffary deductions made)
“ that he pay all the remainder to the endow-
“ ment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to
“ be eftablifhed forever in the faid Univerfity,
“ and to be performed in the manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the firft
“ Tuefday in Eaſter Term, a Lecturer be yearly
“ choſen by the Heads of Colleges only, and
“ by no others, in the room adjoining to the
“ Printing-Houſe, between the hours of ten in
“ the morning and two in the afternoon, to
“ preach eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the
“ year following, at St. Mary’s in Oxford, be-
“ tween the commencement of the laſt month
“ in

“ in Lent Term, and the end of the third
“ week in Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached
“ upon either of the following subjects—to
“ confirm and establish the Christian Faith,
“ and to confute all heretics and schismatics—
“ upon the divine authority of the Holy Scrip-
“ tures—upon the authority of the writings of
“ the primitive Fathers, as to the faith and
“ practice of the primitive Church—upon the
“ Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
“ —upon the Divinity of the Holy Ghost—
“ upon the Articles of the Christian Faith, as
“ comprehended in the Apostles’ and Nicene
“ Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always
“ printed, within two months after they are
“ preached, and one copy shall be given to the
“ Chancellor of the University, and one copy to
“ the Head of every College, and one copy to
“ the Mayor of the City of Oxford, and one
“ copy to be put into the Bodleian Library;
“ and the expence of printing them shall be
“ paid out of the revenue of the Lands or Estates
“ given for establishing the Divinity Lecture
“ Sermons; and the Preacher shall not be paid,
“ nor

“ nor be entitled to the revenue, before they are
“ printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person
“ shall be qualified to preach the Divinity Lec-
“ ture Sermons, unless he hath taken the De-
“ gree of Master of Arts at least, in one of the
“ two Universities of Oxford or Cambridge ;
“ and that the same person shall never preach
“ the Divinity Lecture Sermons twice.”

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

Introduction—plan of the Lectures. Faith defined—significations of the word—chiefly two—an intellectual and a practical principle—the first to be considered in this Lecture. Origin of all personal Knowledge—this knowledge too confined—Faith necessary in many instances—in Natural Philosophy—even in abstract Sciences—especially in History. Reasonableness of Faith because of the Ability and Veracity of man—these considered. Certainty of Faith—Remark on Science—Degrees of credibility. Qualifications necessary to a right judgment in matters of Faith. Conclusion.

S E R M O N II.

Faith a principle of Action—acceptations of the term under this head—its Propriety and Value to be considered. It is, first, necessary from a Defect of other Principles—Secondly, it is productive of the Welfare of mankind—these two positions to be proved. 1. Faith is necessary to Moral Philosophy—to the other Arts—to

C O N T E N T S.

to the common Intercourse of life—therefore,
2. requisite to the welfare of man—this more particularly exemplified both in the splendid effects it is able to produce, and in those that are of nearest concern—lastly, in the use of History to all concerns—objection from the want of Veracity considered. Conclusion.

S E R M O N III.

Faith in Divine Testimony no subject of question—The authenticity of a Revelation the only thing to be proved—This depends on Human Testimony. Natural Religion—Jewish—Mahometan—Christian. Acceptations of the term Faith in Scripture. Books of the New Testament proved authentic from external evidence—their authority proved from the veracity and ability of the Writers of these Books thus authenticated—question of Inspiration considered—hence the authenticity and authority of the books, and, consequently, the Truth of the Gospel Dispensation, complete—additional arguments. Books of the Old Testament proved by the New, by external evidence, by the connexion between the Law and Gospel, the type and anti-type of each other. Conclusion.

S E R M O N

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N IV.

Internal evidence of the Gospel—its necessity and use shewn to be limited—external evidence preferred—nothing absurd or contradictory in the New Testament—some points however pretended to be so. Doctrines divided into two kinds—1. Mysteries of Faith—2. Articles relating to the Moral Law, and the Oeconomy of Divine Providence—the objections against the first to be considered. The Gospel mysteries, properly considered, and as far as men are materially concerned, plain and few—the right mode of considering them—doctrine of the Trinity proved—observations on it—doctrine of a personal Resurrection. Conclusion.

S E R M O N V.

Articles of Christian Faith entitled to farther credit by the Effects to which they tend—scriptural acceptations of Faith as a practical principle—system of Gospel Morality perfect—necessary from the ignorance of men. Objections relating to the Divine Oeconomy considered—predestination—grace—free will—justification by faith and works. Moral Rules of Christianity consistent, and comprisable in few
and

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and even one rule. Inferences from the consistency and detached Form of the Gospel.

S E R M O N VI.

Religious Establishments—necessity of Government in general—of ecclesiastical—each Church independent—subordination of ecclesiastical institutions to civil government—particulars necessary to every Church—eulogium on the Church of England—propriety of Creeds and Articles—Athanasian Creed—Religious Education—Remark on Infant Baptism.

S E R M O N VII.

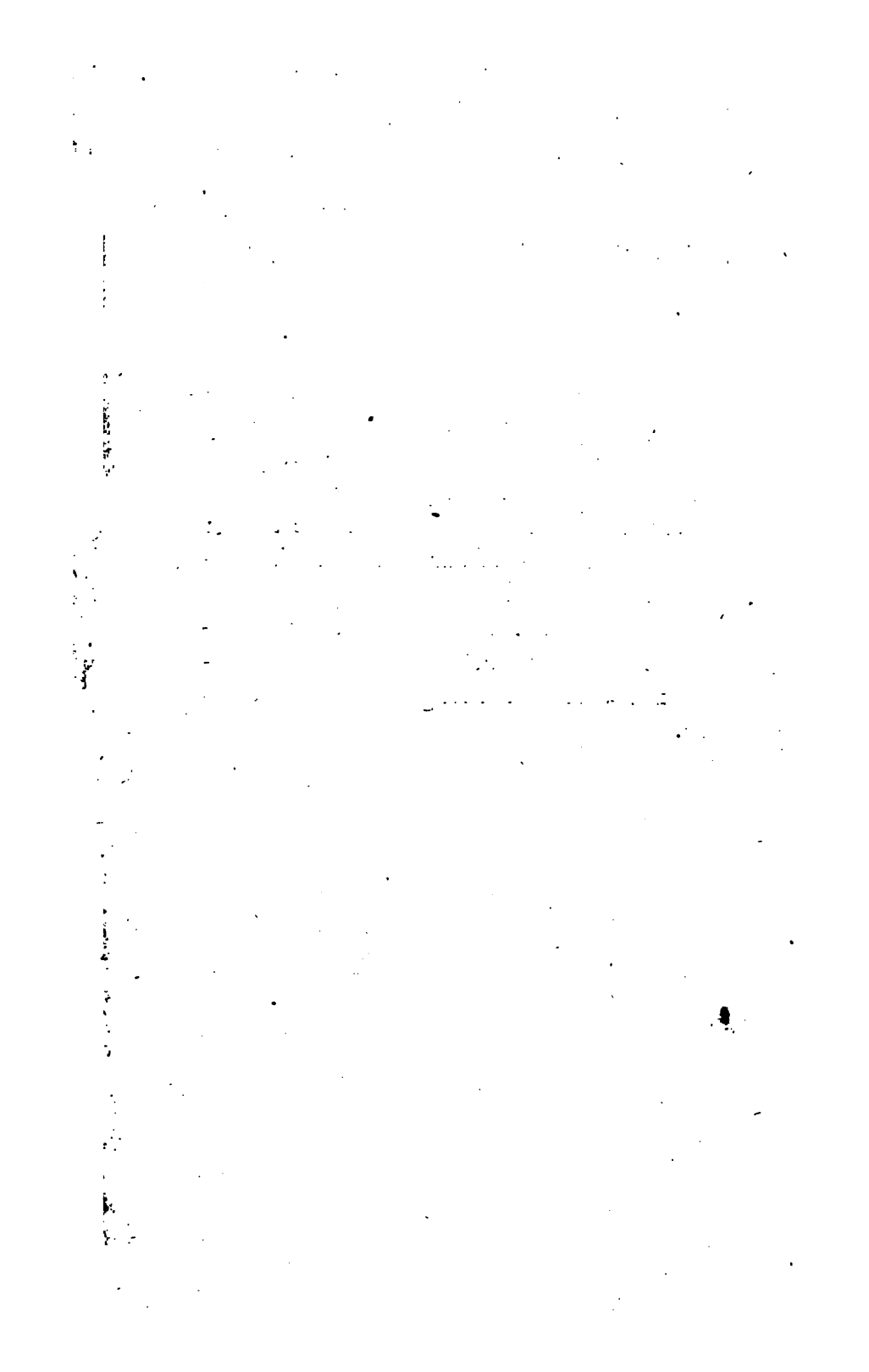
Heresies—no proof of Fault in any Church—the causes of errors various. 1. Impracticability of some subjects—2. Want of Sagacity in the Enquiries—3. Want of Preparation—4. Want of other requisites. Division of Errors into those of the Understanding, and those of the Heart—the latter alone in Scripture denominated Heresies—corruption of the heart shewn to affect our pursuits of religious knowledge—ambition—avarice—love of pleasure—all Heretics called in Scripture Carnal men—how Vice produces Heresy—inferences from this review of it—it is odious—contemptible—
and

C O N T E N T S.

and yet dangerous—this last considered at length. Conclusion.

S E R M O N VIII.

Recapitulation—inference—farther remarks on Heresy—Means and Motives of guarding against it, viz. the Scriptures—the Duty and Happiness of man. History of our Establishment—inference—representation of the temper of the present times—of our own condition and the doctrines of the Church—friendly to temporal happiness as well as instrumental to eternal—friendly to Learning—defence of Learning. Inference in favour of the English Clergy—Conclusion.



S E R M O N I.

H E B. XI. I.

*Faith — is the Evidence of Things
not seen.*

IT has been commonly said, that the mistakes and ignorance, by which men continually suffer in the conduct of their affairs, are chiefly owing to themselves. And indeed it seems at first sight necessary that we should think so, in justice to the benevolence of the Creator, and also from a due estimation of human abilities. Hence therefore, if this be allowed, we may at once assert that, were our investigation of truth in matters of moment at all suitable to their importance, it would long since have become superfluous to discuss any question respecting the main concerns of life. A serious enquiry into such points impartially entered on and prudently conducted, with a due deference to the wisdom of others, must generally terminate in knowledge. But more especially then would this be the case, if in any such sub-

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ject human care and abilities were, as through the mercy of God they have so largely been, assisted by divine Revelation. If we had not the power to shut our eyes against this glorious diffusion of light, and to betray our own interests to the perversions of prejudice, the monitor would then have had only to awaken our remembrance, and to forward our zeal. But, alas! we are told that the real state of things presents a different view: that in every age and country, from the first conversion of mankind by the Gospel to the present time, we may trace the mournful triumph of vice and frailty over human reason and human happiness. It has, more particularly, been observed, that it is the constant tendency of the weakness and corruption of our nature to proceed finally to the depravation even of that faculty in us which is simply concerned about truth and falsehood: not that such a consequence is derived from any impotence of this faculty, or that it is inadequate to the purposes for which it was designed; but that it is become too capable, since the fall, of being misguided; and of being led aside, or impelled precipitately forward by the passions: that through these error assails it in various methods, which need not now be recounted, too often successfully: but, above all, when a Habit of evil conduct once enslaves the will, a fatal chain is then continued forward, gradually involving every desire and
concep-

conception of the mind, till a reluctance to virtue, and a consequent wish to find its laws unauthorized by truth, throw it at last around that reason which is the best image of God within us, fettering or distorting all its genuine operations; till, as far as may be, the whole man becomes the captive of scepticism and infidelity, and an evil heart of unbelief whispers to the fool that "there is no God."

Taking therefore for the present as granted, what thus seems to follow from the condition of our nature, that every Degree of error may obtain: since also the experience of all past ages has farther shewn that every Kind has at different times prevailed, more or less, in the world; the defender of truth has a serious and perpetual task entailed upon his office: especially as it hath been also remarked, that he has not only to combat with new doctrines which a refined ingenuity may proceed to invent; but has still to contend with those of every sort and degree which obstinacy and ignorance have at any former time produced, which, though repeatedly refuted, are constantly brought forward under a different or even a similar shape. In the midst of this field of warfare, the peculiar objects of his care will necessarily be those truths, which the circumstances of each present time enable the enemy of Religion to attack with

most advantage. Thus, if a liberal and inquisitive age should study to discriminate between the authentic and the spurious records of antiquity, heresy will naturally, under the mask of this liberality and diligence, dispute and deny even the rudiments of the christian faith. If the improved reason of any nation justly reject an undue deference to the commands of human authority or the dictates of human wisdom, not only prejudice, which may claim our regard, but licentiousness and ambition may be expected to defy the first altogether as tyrannical, and to deride the last as absurd or unintelligible.

In such a state of things, it will not, it is presumed, appear ever idle, since it cannot be unseasonable, to take some review even of the Principles on which the Gospel is founded, and of those on which the Profession of it in this country and the Administration of its Discipline are built. Nor, if, in the course of such an attempt, truth should receive the least confirmation, or the Pretensions of infidelity and heresy be in the least weakened, will, I trust, the design of this Institution have been unanswered.

Before that any defence of religious truth can be properly entered upon, it is evidently necessary

sary that the Principle, on which all revelation depends, should be clearly understood, and justly appreciated. There is, we must be aware, reason to lament that this is far from being universally the case, and on two different accounts. The libertine and worldly man deride, or cannot brook, the notion of sacrificing the evidence of their senses, which, as it were, bring home to them the value of things present, to a regard unto "things hoped for" hereafter. The self-sufficient sophist, on the other hand, affects to undervalue every other wisdom than the sure deductions of reason from certain and evident truths. Amid these oppositions, which an attentive man may observe to have always abounded, and still to divide the world against the doctrines of *Faith*, it is then of necessary importance to consider, on what grounds and with what degree of credit this great principle may claim, in the Apostle's words, to be "the evidence of things not seen."

Faith, by a definition that seems not improper, and that is consistent with St. Paul's account of it, is an assent of the understanding to propositions because of the testimony of others; by which it is distinguishable from science and opposed to disbelief.

It is, I am persuaded, evidently agreeable to strict propriety to consider *Faith*, or *Belief*, in this simple manner, and to refer all those other significations which the term has acquired unto this, as the original source from which they have been derived. It is indeed a sufficient argument in its favour, that it is most conducive to perspicuity; for it is unquestionably the only mean of preventing confusion, which, as it is obvious, must follow an undetermined latitude, and in no small degree; and which has in this case particularly arisen from an indiscriminate use of the term, while we do not preserve the simplicity of the primary notion, and keep clear in our minds the relation to it, through which its derivative acceptations take their respective force and extent of meaning.

There are indeed, according to the well known usage of all languages, many secondary ideas expressed by the word *Faith*. These there is no occasion at present to exemplify. It is however material to mention a distribution of them into two classes. Of these the first may comprehend all those acceptations which respect the existence or consequences of belief, as a matter of the *Intellect* only: such are the belief of any particular tenet, an assurance of the verity of particular witnesses. The other may include the *Conduct* which is the result of belief, or of those

those effects which it produces in the mind. It is my purpose in the present discourse to confine myself to intellectual Faith, the first of these divisions, and to consider its propriety and importance as a species of human knowledge.

We are taught by the great Writer on this subject,* that man is born with nothing more at first than a capacity of receiving ideas ; which are impressed upon the mind by sensation and reflection ; and afterwards are by its operation farther abstracted and compounded. Nor, as I presume, do experience and observation tend to disprove this opinion, but are the ground on which it safely rests.

But, if we apply this doctrine to the concerns of each individual man, and deduce the progress and consequence of such principles, it will be an obvious remark on this statement, that the channel of information derived from such a source is confined within narrow bounds, and that the accumulation of human knowledge thus obtained will be of small amount. It limits the materials on which the mind may exercise its powers to the scanty pittance of each man's single experience, and restrains him in the

* Locke, B. II. c. i, and xii.

pursuit after truth to the solitary exertion of his own abilities. To prove this remark shortly, it will be only necessary to suggest the almost infinite number and variety of propositions, which are received generally among the learned part of mankind, and form the bulk of human science. It will thence appear to those who investigate the subject, how short and inefficacious would be the unassisted powers of the most subtile or industrious of men.

As human science is widely diffused, it will not be improper here to lead our recollection unto some particular instances. Among the great number that offer themselves, one, as I conceive, not ill chosen, is the study of the natural world or what is termed Natural Philosophy, on account of the confessed propriety of the rules and method of its procedure. I trust that in this science it will occur how few of the individual facts, from which the induction is made unto general truths, are such as fall within any one person's knowledge; very few indeed comparatively with the number requisite to a legitimate inference, and still much less on all the parts of that extensive system. I may even be justified in saying that in no one instance is a single person's experience sufficient to this end without the concurrence, in some degree, of that of others. Some facts in particular might be mentioned,

tioned, as being most evidently beyond dispute; being necessarily out of the reach of the generality of men in any one age or country of the world, as they happen in a different quarter of the globe, or have taken place at a different period of time. Among such, to name no more, are observations on many appearances of the heavenly bodies. It follows therefore that most of these facts are applicable only on belief of the testimony of others, and are matters of Faith: without which, as there would not be an adequate collection of Phenomena for observation to proceed on, so we may also observe that an appeal could not be made to the simplicity and Analogy of nature; the aid of Geometry could not be called in to any purpose; and, in fine, this system of philosophy, the boast of modern science, which has advanced the knowledge of man to so wonderful a height, would not have been at all established.

To go yet farther: it may perhaps be questioned, whether even those sciences that are denominated purely abstract and unmixed can exist without a reference to testimony. Such are, particularly, all mathematical studies. These are undoubtedly the systems, wherein the human mind, if in any, has a free scope for its exertions, and a fair title to boast of its proper and single acquirements. All these theories are well

well known to depend on a small number of speculative and practical axioms, which, once admitted, the propositions deduced from them follow with indisputable certainty. But such axioms, although now immediately and without any doubt received on their enunciation, I presume to suppose, such is the weakness of our nature, that no single understanding could originally on its own conviction fully and inflexibly determine to be self-evident and infallible. At least, since some have been denied to be so, and others doubted, for even these a sceptic will dispute, it is plain that a most important accession of confidence, such as fills up the measure of our certainty, arises from the generality of their reception. And then it is obvious, that the mean of communicating this general consent is the testimony that men bear to their own conviction, and is thus matter of Faith.

From these instances, which are designed to exemplify the case of all science, either purely theoretical, or blended with observation and experience, we might proceed to the consideration of that species of knowledge which Faith claims as its own peculiar province ; namely, that which is contained in History of all kinds, properly so called, or the communication of facts and opinions removed from us by the distance of space and of time. But, as it is needless to prove that
Faith

Faith is here a necessary principle, I shall content myself with barely mentioning this topic, nor enlarge on it at present.

If the preceding observations should be just, and are duly considered and applied, I trust that the *Necessity* of Faith to the attainment of truth will fully appear, and the wide extent of our reliance on the word of others, in the quest of that information which, singly, we are not able to obtain,

After this *Necessity*, we shall be properly led next to weigh the *Reasonableness* of this belief, on the ground of its intrinsic worth as a medium of knowledge. This is obviously founded on the deference due to the Veracity and the Ability of men,

On the latter of these topics, it is at first sight obvious that general incredulity may be justly charged with arrogance and obstinacy. For every considerate and sincere man must allow that there are some who exceed others and most probably surpass him, in natural powers of mind, or in the general means of information, or in both. In particular branches of literature it is evident that many must excell him; for no man is able to rise to eminence in every part of literary

literary pursuit. Nay farther, it is equally certain that almost all men, perhaps I should say all, must be capable of instructing him in some one point or other. In order to shew this fully, it may be sufficient to remind him, that, in all probability, every man is born with a capacity and inclination of giving a preference to some instances of application above others, however low and trifling they may sometimes chance to be, and of a consequent proficiency in such pursuits. And in whatever manner accident may affect this natural fitness, may forward or impede it, in some of these particulars it generally has an opportunity to be exerted, and to lead a man on to a considerable degree of skill. Again, in like manner, the destination of men by incidental circumstances to their peculiar employments in life tends to produce a similar consequence, though it cannot advance them to the same degree of eminence, as when natural ability and inclination conspire with assiduous diligence. Herein therefore these know more, and may boast of imparting knowledge to men possessed of far superior intellects, and more favourable opportunities of general information. In thus briefly stating these facts, by which it appears, that the greatest philosophers must be liable to receive instruction from the meanest among mankind, it is needless to dwell on the many intermediate situations of men in respect to their
literary

literary rank, which consequently would furnish so many more instances of mutual communication and credit.

Nor, if we pass on to the other qualification of Integrity, shall we find our argument for the value of Faith as a principle of knowledge checked or weakened in its progress. It is very usual indeed to murmur and declaim against the deceitfulness of the world : but the reason of the case, and the opinion of the sensible part of mankind, authorise a more favourable determination.

In enquiring into this subject, by an investigation of the motives that are likely to sway men in giving evidence of facts and opinions, we should be careful not to omit any among the principal ones on either side. And first, in the number of those that incline men to Veracity, the natural love of truth is by no means to be passed over. As natural, it is also universal, and may be supposed to direct every man's testimony, unless it can be shewn that some other motive interferes sufficiently powerful to set it aside. It will easily be replied that this is much too often the case. But, though this be undeniable by reason of the corruption of our nature, yet it still remains, and often directs by its influence. It is likewise to be considered at other times as an
assistant

assistant to the rest on the same side. Such are the shame of asserting what is at the same time secretly contradicted by the evidence of our own mind; the natural tendency to self-love and to benevolence, which are both generally best promoted by adherence to truth; the fear of detection, and the dread of the punishment that, in some shape or other, awaits the voluntary and premeditated violation of it. And, if to these powerful motives of conduct we, lastly, add the sanction which true religion lends to every part of virtue, we shall be led to acknowledge that there is ample ground for confidence in the Veracity of human testimony. Whoever shall decide otherwise, will maintain an opinion unworthy of God in his creation and moral government of the world. The Almighty must either be supposed to have conceived a mean plan in intending to create such vile and wicked beings, or to have come short of his purpose, or to have suffered them to fall into such objects as are destitute of all claim to respectability. But this, not only a pious man, but also any candid and sensible observer of mankind will never admit to be the case. We must indeed allow that there is room for caution, while every kind of depraved passion and external temptation is present to solicit them occasionally to falsehood and dissimulation. But I contend, that to suppose the qualification of Veracity too sublime

time for man in his present state, and that it is ridiculous to attribute it to him; or, because some things are to be disbelieved, to conclude that all are to be doubted, and not very many to be received with perfect confidence, is far from accuracy and genuine circumspection. These require that a line should be drawn: and true criticism will enable men, by contemplating the nature of the evidence, and investigating its circumstances, to set at a great distance from the limits of hesitation an infinite number of assertions proposed to their belief. On the contrary, it is too manifest, from our experience and observation, that weakness and ignorance of mind are very great causes of incredulity. The one is that which so often leads to disbelief, the other at least to distrust and suspicion. For the latter is deficient in those qualifications of experience and theory, which give so material a support to the credit of a new relation: the former, as it is still more pitiable, is the cause of as grievous and more culpable mistakes than credulity itself: nor can such scrupulousness ever deserve the name of prudence; or will the end of such habits ever be wisdom and knowledge.

If, referring to what has been argued on the Veracity and Ability of men as witnesses, we proceed to consider the *Certainty* annexed to this species

species of knowledge, what has been already advanced will assist our enquiry. Philosophical writers on this subject have ranked Faith very low in the scale of assent; I mean the Belief of human testimony, which alone we are considering. But this, I presume, is evidently done only on account of the great variety of cases under this head, in the lowest of which such evidence is entitled to small credit: nay in some, as it has been intimated, it is entitled to none at all. This, however, affords no argument why there may not be many instances, in which it would be utterly unreasonable not to place a perfect confidence, equal to that reposed on indemonstrable axioms or the certain deductions of science. I need not exemplify this assertion any farther than by mentioning, that, as otherwise no one could be certain of the existence of any thing to which he had not been a sensible witness, a man could not know, to adduce such instances as have been alledged by a great writer, that there did exist any country in the world which he had not seen, or that there had lived any person in past times whose name is only recorded by historians. Human testimony, in these and the innumerable other examples that might be adduced, is capable of an accession of so many undeniable confirmations of its truth, that it is impossible for the human mind, constituted as it is, to refuse as full and firm an assent

sent as it is capable of giving. And, first, these confirmations may arise out of the Matter itself of the report. For this, as it is evident, may be such as can of itself afford a very powerful argument for its truth. It may be parallel to other matters within our knowledge in similar cases; or it may be likewise concluded as almost certain from premises of which we are in possession: it may be connected necessarily or probably with other facts related on the same authority, which have been proved to be true. It may also be such, that all the possible causes of mistake or falsehood may be greatly overbalanced by others that guard from error and oblige to veracity; or that it may not admit of scarcely the least principle of deception: or, lastly, the consequences of mistaking the fact may be such, that it would be in opposition to every leading principle of the human heart to do so. It is easy, but needless, to bring to view more particulars that tend to the same purpose. The Character of the Witnesses also may in some instances of testimony be placed beyond impeachment. They may be peculiarly capable of apprehending their subject, eminently versed in it, or assisted by circumstances that afford them a full and plain perception of it. Again, they may be particularly interested in the truth of what they relate. Their principles, their honor, their advantage, nay every passion and desire belonging

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to their temper and condition that can be concerned in the verity or falshood of any evidence, may be here involved. Again, in the case where the relation is a matter of antiquity and communicated by written tradition, another circumstance occurs, which indeed, at the same time that it is especially advantageous in this instance, always avails to promote the credit of all testimony; namely, the Reception it has obtained in the world. For surely, after all that can be justly objected against Authority, considered apart from reason, arguments will be left sufficient to preserve to it a considerable share of weight and importance. It could not be for nothing that genius and opportunity have been given to some men above others. And yet if it were not for the purpose of assisting those who are inferior to them, by instruction and advice, they must have been given for nothing, or for so partial a purpose as may be deemed to fall short of the benevolent designs of the Creator of mankind. But advice consisting of general wisdom or knowledge of truth applied to particular cases, it must, where such application is not at all or is imperfectly discerned, be received on the Authority of the adviser; and how often this advice becomes necessary to all it is superfluous to attempt to shew. To proceed, it may in some cases be the sanction of the greatest number of wise and good men; nay in some may amount to

to an universal one in all ages and countries. And this, accompanied by other arguments, seems to effect the highest kind of conviction. Similarly to self evident principles, it seems as if the existence of such facts were necessarily impressed on men, as implied in the natural constitution of things, or derived from the natural suggestions of our minds. Hence universal tradition is not to be withstood; and the farther back its subject stands removed in the annals of the world, the more authority it seems intitled to over our understanding.

While therefore it has been allowed that there are different degrees of credibility in faith, it appears at the same time that of these some amount to the highest, and require, as indeed they do obtain, an entire acquiescence. It may not be impertinent here to add a remark on the case of Science, which is perhaps too much the boast of the philosopher, especially when he degrades the force of Testimony in comparison with it. It must be far indeed from any one to wish, if it were even possible to accomplish it, that the pillars of human knowledge should be weakened or rendered objects of suspicion: but it is on every account not a little useful to shew that modesty rather than presumption becomes us, even in those circumstances from which we

are most apt to please and exalt ourselves. It has been before observed, that in the most abstract speculations, which are regarded as the pure and absolute province of the mind, our understanding, destitute of concurrent testimony, can ill or not so well assure itself of the Infallibility of those Principles on which the structure is raised. In matters that fall under the notice of our senses, the mind is subject to greater disadvantages. Observations of Facts, it is well known, are often inaccurate and false, on account of accidental imperfections in the means themselves, or difficulty in the objects, or unfavourable disposition of other particulars. Deductions in Reasoning also are liable to be defective or incorrect from the difficulty of the subject, from incidental disqualification in the enquirer, or from other causes, which apply to a far greater variety of cases than are acknowledged. These all occasion a necessity for the coincident testimony of other persons, to confirm the certainty of such informations, and the justness of such conclusions. If Faith therefore is liable to mistake, so likewise is human Science. Both of them, happily for the interests of man, are equally capable of being rendered correct by many concurrent circumstances that tend to confirm or disprove: nay, farther, as it has been intimated, both equally afford this help to each other, throwing a reciprocal light, which
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often displays the truth of each other's assertions, and shews what was before only highly probable to be clear of all uncertainty. The observation, which we should hence deduce, is that neither has any right to boast itself in contempt of the other ; but that they are mutual auxiliaries, and, in the spirit of that forcible figure in holy writ, are members of the same body, which striving together, with the strength that the measure of every part supplieth, make increase of the whole until it reach unto the fullness of the stature of human knowledge.

But to return : it is clearly perceivable with what particulars the mind is concerned, in forming a due estimation of any evidence in matters of Faith. It is also obvious to remark that there must be many Degrees distinguishable of such estimation, according to the positive arguments for such evidence, or the comparative worth or insignificance of those on each side. To ascertain these, as far, I mean, as it is necessary or important to us, there is no reason to suppose human sagacity otherwise than well qualified : and there is a good reason afforded in the wisdom and benevolence of the creator that it is well qualified. He has undoubtedly ordained, that, in a task so necessary and useful to our state, the mind shall, as it has a free and ample employment, so also have no vain and hopeless

task for its powers, in discriminating between the several values of the relations that are offered to its reception.

But it is now to be observed that these powers are requisite on the side of the enquirer, and, if in Science, are also to be supposed in cases of Faith. For it is not to be forgotten that all knowledge demands a competent share of perception and judgment, without which the most certain truths must fail of procuring assent. And it is owing to the want of an attentive and impartial exercise of a sound understanding, that many things proposed to the belief of mankind miss of a due reception among persons, who yet loudly complain of a defect in that evidence, which they do not comprehend, or the force of which they do not care to acknowledge.

And here we are led to a particular, in which we are still more generally and very seriously concerned, namely, the Candour with which we should enter on the estimation of any evidence. But the consequences that must attend a deficiency in this qualification, as well as in those of Humility and Attention, are so manifest, that they need not be enumerated or displayed : and the only remark that I shall add is, that, if it were not for that defect which was before mentioned, a heart of disbelief, men fully qualified

lified by knowledge, sense, and candour would allow, that whatever is not absolutely impossible is necessarily liable to be matter of Faith ; that, because a thing is unknown or even beyond the possibility of ever being known by our senses, there is on this account not the least argument why it should be derided as a thing incredible ; it being precisely in that situation which makes Faith a necessary principle ; and there being a possibility that it will be reported on such authority, that it may be confidently and firmly believed.

To conclude : human Testimony, as a mean of knowledge, has, I hope, been shewn to be built on foundations that claim our respect and our confidence. Beside the consideration that without it the circle of human intelligence would have been small and inconsiderable, nay, farther, would have been incomplete ; which would of itself afford a strong argument of its being a just evidence of truth ; it has from its own nature a good and clear pretension to our assent and submission. Notwithstanding the limited and corrupted nature of man, generally considered, there is sufficient Ability and Veracity left to give it in innumerable instances a clear and solid credibility. These essentials to such an end are very often so elucidated and confirmed

by the accompanying Evidences of things and persons, as well as by the nature of the Matter itself, the Deference it meets with among the wise and good, and in some cases by its general Reception by mankind in all times and countries, as to amount to a full and undeniable certainty. Farther, the mind, when it is as far as it may be expected to be, properly prepared, is competent to decide, at least as far as it may be requisite to do so, on the several Degrees of assent to which this evidence is entitled.

If these things are true, let us then look with all due estimation on the cause, whenever we are led to contemplate the great and important effects which this species of knowledge is able to produce in the intellectual world ; when we consider that it cheers and enlightens the mind, by illustrating or correcting the process and conclusions of solitary genius and labour ; by enlarging its wealth through the social interchange of various acquirements ; by animating unto new investigations ; and by contributing to secure the success of its attempts. Let us remember, with the respect certainly owed to the cause of such a blessing, that it alone qualifies us to enjoy the inheritance of all that a pious zeal has preserved from the wreck of antiquity ; that it alone forms the channel, along which the
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riches that lie in neighbouring and in most distant regions of the world are communicated mutually between each other ; thus, in one instance, subjecting to our disposal those accumulated stores of reason and experience, which Time had, else, irretrievably alienated ; and, in the other, bringing into one grand view the vast but diffused treasures of knowledge, which Space had widely removed from all participation.



S E R M O N I I .

H E B. XI. I.

Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for.

HITHERTO Faith, in order to perspicuity, has been considered simply as a mean of Knowledge ; and in this view has been treated with respect only to the Understanding of man. But the manifest connexion between the Intellect and the Will leads, in the next place, to regard it as a cause and an instrument of Action. For all knowledge of the nature of things is inseparably followed by a difference of esteem and choice between what appears good and what appears evil : and it may reasonably be judged, that the capacity for one was given for the sole purpose in this world of leading unto the other.

In proceeding to contemplate Faith as it is, in any manner, connected with the conduct of man, it is, first, evident that what has been in
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the preceding discourse advanced in favour of its claim to our deference, is immediately applicable in the present. The consideration of it, which we are now to attempt, will, I hope, lead unto farther and decisive arguments in defence of its propriety and value.

By the definition, which has been laid down of Faith, it was considered to be simply an Assent on Testimony ; and to have given rise to other subsequent significations of the term. As related to Practice, it has been the source of some other acceptations which may all be easily deduced from the same original notion. Thus first, it immediately produces a *Habit of acting* as any particular truths require from reasonable men on account of being believed. A determination to observe this conduct, where another party is concerned in our observance of it, often occasions an *external Profession* of it by word or other sign. This is also adhered to in many cases with a *Constancy* undiverted by trials of pleasure and danger. It gives birth to an *Attachment* unto the party of those persons, from such an engagement with whom we experience or hope some advantage. It lastly causes a *Firmness* and *Confidence of Mind*, secure against the disquietude to which doubt or distrust might tempt, on an apprehension of loss or trouble from
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our adherence to what we believe.—Unto these particulars, which are at different times expressed by the word at first appropriated to the original idea, does Faith, or Belief in the Testimony of others, naturally lead. And this, as it has been before intimated, is according to the analogy of all language. It is obvious again to remark, that such attentions to derivation would prevent the confusion, which is so generally incident to investigations on every subject.

That our persuasion of any important truth related to us precedes and has an influence on our actions, it is not necessary to prove to have been the Apostle's opinion. Nor, as I trust, do I need an apology for the inversion that has been made in the sentence of my text, and for the justifiable latitude with which I have applied it, beyond the particular meaning to which it was subservient in that passage. The manner, in which this persuasion influences the conduct of men, is by so representing to their minds those distant objects which affect their desire or aversion, and are matters of expectation, that they are, as it were, already possessed or endured by the anticipation of hope or fear. This hourly experience teaches us to be the case, in concurrence with the authority of St. Paul, who here calls Faith “the substance of things hoped for;” the mean by which things, that, if present,

present, would be sensibly felt by us, even at a distance and “unseen,” act on the soul with similar force and effect.

Now Faith, considered thus as a cause of action, or, according to my purpose, more generally, as in any way connected with the conduct of man, may be fully proved to merit our regard. And, first, being obviously a principle by which all men are influenced at all times, and in all the affairs of life, it is evidently a part of the universal order of things, and the design of the Divine Author and Governor of nature. On this, which may therefore be adduced as an argument for its propriety as well as importance, there is no need to expatiate.

If, on looking farther, and contemplating the varied process by which the affairs of the world are carried on, we should perceive a *Necessity* also of the interference of this principle *because of a deficiency of others*, its claim to our regard will appear in a stronger light. For what is discerned to be thus essential to the operations of mankind in the conduct of human affairs, must appear still more worthy of all confidence from men. It carries a more obvious proof that it is the purpose of Almighty God that we should be swayed and directed by it; and therefore

fore must be a true and just rule, proceeding from the fountain of all truth. And, if it yet be boasted that the evident deductions of science shine with superior lustre, it is to be remembered that both are equally necessary, however distinguished one from the other, and have been also shewn to be requisite to each other's existence and perfection.

Again; another argument will arise from the consideration of the *effects* which *Faith* is calculated to produce. If these are great and momentous to the happiness of mankind, then, beside the weight they ought to have with us on that account, it is plainly to be concluded from the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Almighty Creator, that such a cause of good must have proceeded from him. For, certainly, it is not possible to conceive, that a method which is so generally and necessarily instrumental to the well being of his creatures, should not have been his work.

A particular attention to the facts supposed in these topics may, beside the expediency of it to prove the main argument which has been undertaken, lead also to some other useful conclusions.

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The *Necessity* of Faith to the concerns of life may, first, easily be made manifest from what has been before shewn. For, being requisite even to abstract science, and much more to observation and experience, it thus becomes essential to learning in general; and assists towards establishing the principles, on which all the Arts and Sciences depend that are advantageous to human life. Without it also as they could not be rightly commenced, so neither can they without its continual aid be carried on in their progress toward perfection.

Thus, to begin with that science which is our greatest concern, Moral Philosophy, considered in its several parts, has no sufficient ground on which its structure may be raised by human wit, without the collected experience of wise men in different countries and in different ages. The rules indeed of Personal Duty seem, like the doctrines of abstract quantity, capable of being deduced by a single mind from an observation of itself and things without, and from its own apprehensions of fitness and propriety. Yet, however every individual person of calm and impartial judgement might be inclined to think justly, in general, of the several points in which his duty is concerned; yet, amid the passions and evil habits of others that deform the examples set before his view, and his own weak and corrupted

rupted nature, who could have a right to be at all times well assured of the opinions he had formed alone? And, if the narrow and subtle boundaries of virtue and vice, the differences likely to be entertained on many points by persons differently circumstanced, and at different times, or in different countries, be comprehended in the account of difficulties, how much less probable does it appear? If this statement be not enough, let the fact speak for us in those particulars, about which even the wisest men of antiquity, at the head of their several sects, never agreed in their opinion, and in some all deviated from the truth. And this difference and these errors were not about trifling or minute questions, but such as had an important influence on moral conduct; about questions that related to the nature and providence of God, the nature and measures of virtue, and the principles and motives of action. Nay, even now, under the glorious light of the Gospel, it is too obvious to need an exposition at large, that men left to themselves still mistake and lose their way in points of moment to their peace and virtue. So that we may certainly pronounce that moral wisdom is not the result of a solitary research. In truth therefore, an assurance of our being right, or at least the certain way of being so, is to look beyond our own opinions unto those of others, to compare our conceptions and deduc-

tions with theirs; lest, though admitted and formed with the greatest caution and candour possible, they should, as certainly they would, mislead and injure us. Example and experience are also necessary, not only to illustrate the beauty of virtue and deformity of vice, but to prove satisfactorily that the first is indeed a just and true system, really suitable to our general nature and the constitution of things around us, and calculated to effect our happiness. But again, for these we are often necessarily obliged to the communication of other persons; no single man's experience being adequate to all the various parts of moral duty, at least when it may be most expedient or requisite that he should form his decision on the subject. It is therefore scarcely necessary to remark that, so far, we must in numberless instances rely on the Veracity and Ability of those to whom we refer ourselves.

And, if in this part of Ethics, where man is placed in a single situation, he is not sufficient, without the aid of Testimony, to trace the paths of virtue; still less must he be so in the remaining branches of the science, where his duty is rendered more intricate by a Relation to other persons. And as the number of those with whom we are engaged is increased, since we are differently connected or more intimately concerned with some than others, the greater of
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course, from the variety of our obligations in kind and degree, becomes the difficulty, amid those obstructions to accurate judgment and those temptations to partiality in opinion, to which an imperfect and depraved nature makes us liable.

But the task swells upon us with a formidable increase of difficulty, when its bounds are enlarged to the utmost, and we are, as it were, launched into the sea of Political Duty. The weak reason of man would here be ill able to explore the track which the strict laws of right and prudence require him to pursue, or to give him any assurance concerning that direction which it may suggest to be the true one. He looks anxiously for tokens of the course which those have steered, to whom past ages and the present concur in paying the tribute of approbation and applause; whose experience, while assisted by the wisdom of preceding times it led them to correct and advance their own knowledge, has left behind that indication of such danger and difficulties as await him, without which he could not have the animating hope of arriving at "the haven where he would be." Here History, whose proper medium is dependance on Testimony, affords this needful guidance, communicating the notice of past events, the transactions of nearer and of more distant ages, and instructing by precepts drawn from that representation

of the examples which it exhibits. Undirected by this wisdom, the man of publick business, in whatever station he be placed, generally stands exposed to inevitable shipwreck, being ignorant of the direction which he should take ; either too fearfully changing his course at every appearance of danger and difficulty ; or too boldly steering forward, and not bending it unto present occasions as every skilful man must, and may do without any disparagement to the honor and steadiness of his character.

Again ; in the instance of the Arts that conduce to the Support, Convenience, or Elegance of life, it is unnecessary to shew by much argument, that the exercise of them depends greatly on the trust and confidence we repose one in another. The narrow limits which confine the strength, time, and opportunities of each man, of which we are surely all conscious, sufficiently prove that the necessity of such a dependance must exist.

And, if from Science and Art we descend upon the wide theatre of common life, where losing as it were their separate forms they constitute by their effects the complex scene of human affairs, we may more easily observe the necessity of the same principle in every part of it. And the

the reason is equally obvious, and may be soon stated. In that immense variety of ordinary concerns with which each man is necessarily engaged, it is plainly impossible for him to acquire a sufficient personal knowledge of them all, nay of any considerable portion of them; or, if he could, in the daily multitude of occurrences to make use of that knowledge, in actually determining his own choice, and executing his own purposes. On others therefore, in their several stations or employments, he must hourly depend to judge and act for him in numerous instances; as it will be evident to every one who gives himself time to recollect them. And though, above all, in that department wherein the scale of this interchange in our concerns is importantly enlarged, the truth of the remark is more obviously manifest; in Commercial Negotiations credit in others being commonly termed the soul of all its proceedings; yet it is not less true in the more narrow and familiar pursuits of private life. In this, numberless Objects also, which we daily set ourselves to pursue under the denomination of pleasure or advantage, from the first commencement of desire even to the time when we cease to be incited to any pursuit, are necessarily such as we learn from others to be worthy of our attention. When the thing that last gave an aim to our wishes has been acquired, we proceed eagerly onward, wherever novelty and the

attestations of others tempt us to follow after new, untried enjoyments. It should be added that the Means also, which we use to procure the objects of our desire, are generally such as the experience or superior sagacity of others directs us to adopt; as well as that, in the proceeding by these means unto our end, we are continually necessitated to rest our hopes of success on the honesty and ability of those whom we entrust to act for us. Enough, I hope, has been said to prove this first point. And I shall only farther observe with respect to the whole of it, that in the Faculty of Persuasion, by which in all the concerns of life men recommend their information and advice to each other, with how much art soever it be applied, the decision in favour of such advice is often founded as much on the personal credibility of the speaker, as in the conviction afforded by eloquence of the truth of the facts and opinions advanced,

It is obvious, that the principle which is thus necessary to the constitution of every art and science, and of all the ordinary concerns of our being, is entitled to no small share of the praise which they can merit at our hands. To be still more duly sensible of its claim to our regard, it remains only to look round in the next place on its *Effects*; to estimate the value of those things which

which afford security and maintenance, or bestow honor, utility, and delight on mankind; remembering that these are not the fruits of solitary labour, but, in so great a measure as hath been shewn, of a dependance upon others. A minute display of this topic would be impossible, and is evidently unnecessary; men in general being too sensible of the importance of worldly blessings to need such an illustration.

Before however we dismiss the subject of the arts, separately considered, and of the relation they bear to common life, blended with the mass of our daily concerns, some deserve to be particularly mentioned; which, at the same time that they are of the greatest importance, peculiarly depend in their application on a confidence in other men. For some of these have raised the powers of man to a nobler height, and extended them to wider limits than the most sanguine expectations could once have reached; and by the rest our dearest interests are liable to be affected in the highest degree,

Among the last are those instances, wherein our life, health, and all the precious rights of personal or social existence are secured and advanced. For to man hath the great Creator of all things chiefly left the charge of man. He is his "brother's keeper," the general instrument

of God's Providence, prompted and directed by natural and revealed religion to guard him from the incidental evils of nature, and the effects of the moral depravity of his own species. When thus impending violence threatens, or secret machination more surely aims to cut short his thread of life, oft does confidence in the friendly power of man guard him from the stroke of death. Again, when pain and sickness debilitate or agonize his frame, submission to human skill oft brings back the enjoyment of ease and vigour. When misfortune or difficulties, slander or disappointment overcast his day, their baleful gloom is cheered by human benevolence, and enlightened by human wisdom. Does the fraud or violence of man invade our civil rights? The ability and courage of man assert and vindicate them. To the goodness and superior power of some men do we owe the hope of advancing our condition of life, and attaining the completion of our reasonable desires. To the faithfulness and integrity of friendship are we indebted for the safety of all that in innumerable instances we commit to its trust; the security of concerns more valuable than wealth, of persons more dear to us than liberty and life itself.

Under the other head we may rank first those splendid benefits derived from the theories of philosophy on the wider concerns of public life;

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on the sublime operation of many arts of peace and war, and the beneficial effects of them to all by the hands of skilful men. It is needless to exemplify either of these by any more instances than that which so eminently exhibits both, the most important profession of those, who, led by science and the experience of others, have established their paths through the waters of the great deep, and unite the most distant regions of the earth to each other; or, in adducing it, to expatiate on the subject. And yet, above these, Faith is the great principle of commercial intercourse, and of political transactions. On the first of these there is also no need to enlarge; while in the great complicated machine of public affairs, it is obvious that the success of many among its most important movements is the result of an almost implicit confidence. And this is eminently visible in those cases, wherein, unto the general necessity of committing the conduct and achievement of great designs to the exertion of particular mens' abilities, is added the circumstance of distance in place and time. In the momentous concern of maintaining the honor and interests of a country in distant seas and foreign climes, or of undertaking to secure the welfare and adjust the pretensions of other nations, who is not sensible of the greatness of that trust which is reposed on the wisdom and integrity of such men? And yet, may we ask, is
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it superior or is it equal to the confidence attending the management of those measures in the internal regulation of each country, which political wisdom is obliged to keep concealed from open view ?

I close this topic by mentioning in few words the great importance of History to all these arts and sciences, as they respect public or private life. It has been particularly spoken of with reference to the last instance adduced, of political conduct : but it is indeed to be considered as generally requisite to all knowledge speculative and practical. For it must be confessed that, in every branch of it, the progress of human attainment has been in all ages more or less gradual. Consequently the steps, by which the mind proceeds towards perfection, must be traced from earlier times : and they must therefore be derived by the oral traditions or written records of past acquirements. And though the labours of preceding ages are less advantageous in some studies than in others, and there are some which have seemed as it were to start at once into being ; yet even here it is certain that such communication is indeed necessary and important, and prepares the way for those wonderful discoveries, which arise in different departments by the singular

singular ability and application of extraordinary men.

What may be proved to be *Necessary* and *Useful* to man, in every concern to which his nature and circumstances lead him, ought to be secure from cavil or disrespect. It must however be observable that the reasonableness and certainty of Faith are attacked. It is, as was remarked on the other branch of this subject, not only undervalued in comparison with personal knowledge and science, but its character positively impeached. These objections, whether on the score of man's ability or his integrity, have been, I hope, sufficiently refuted. On this last point however, in this division of the subject, it may not be impertinent to bestow a farther consideration, by examining a little more into the cause from which this objection arises. It will thus probably be found to confirm, instead of weakening, the credibility against which it is levelled. For it is notorious that these declamations against it are the genuine production, not of judgment, but of interest; not of reason, but of passion. They are not the result of a general survey of the subject, and of a due, adequate reference to the cases with which it is concerned; but of a partial, instant regard to some particular facts detached from others even within their
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own experience, wherein their personal hopes have been disappointed. How ill in general such a mode of ascertaining truth is adapted to its end, is very obvious. It would be strange indeed if it ever succeeded but by chance, when the only capacity in us for apprehending truth or falsehood, our understanding; is set aside; and the perceptions or feelings of our nature, which are made to stimulate the will in obeying its dictates, direct its decisions. For, acted upon as they are by present objects, they can do no more than represent the degree of pain or pleasure which those are able to impress. Swayed by their impulse, how can it be otherwise than that the rash unreasonable man of the world should declaim against a want of fidelity among men, especially in proportion as he may farther be in general ill-informed, or of a contracted and desponding temper? Misguided by the intemperance of his desires, he has either mistaken the nature of the propositions offered to his Faith, or extended them beyond their true bounds, or given them a degree of credit, which, if reason had guided his judgment, would never have been esteemed due to them.

And that such accusers of mankind transgress the bounds of truth, is a conclusion not only to be inferred from reason, but, it may be worthy of remark, is farther supported by the authority
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of the world. Whenever any man is frequently overtaken by inconvenience and distress through confidence in others, it blames, and generally points out the reasons that would have determined him more wisely, if he had not been wanting to himself. I do not speak here of its malicious, but of its reasonable censures. It is qualified to give this sentence, for the same reason that all usually judge truly of the merits of any practical question within their reach, who are disinterested and impartial. Again: this self-deluded unbeliever may be reproved by the conduct of those, who are esteemed of the greatest eminence among men for ability and experience. For it is obvious to those who look much into the busy scenes of life, that such men are generally by no means very suspicious or mistrustful. In the greatest concerns of business they readily rely on the skill and integrity, as in science the truly learned pay deference to the wisdom, of other persons.

In speaking of this matter, I pass by, as undeserving of all notice, the case of those, who disbelieve others because they are sensible they ought not to be believed themselves; who, having wickedly corrupted in their own breasts the fountain of veracity, are not capable of conceiving that the spring can flow pure and untainted from the heart of another.

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This representation in favour of mutual confidence will also be farther confirmed by a more particular view of the case of a good man. Judging of others as they really are, often very liable to depart from veracity, yet very capable of being kept steady on the side of truth by natural principle, by virtue, even by their interests and desires, he does not rob himself of the advantages afforded to discern how far they are intitled to his confidence, by the blind dictate of passion, or the confused suggestions of his unreasonable views and appetites. He sees his object calmly and steadily; and being, as far as may be, an indifferent spectator, can define its boundaries with accuracy, and view it in all its different relations. In cases of difficulty and doubt he is not hurried into a decision by the precipitancy of his inclinations; he can reap the fruits of a patient investigation; he can, as it were, contemplate it on every side, at different distances, and in different lights; he can stay for the helps which time ever brings toward the discovery of truth, by an improvement of man's own ability, or by the opportunities it may furnish of seeing his object under better circumstances; and, lastly, he can avail himself of the security and aid, which the opinion of wise and good men lends to such as have the humility to seek, and sincerity to follow it.

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To close this argument: from such a statement as the above, we may, I am persuaded, infer that a reliance on human Veracity is an useful mean of arriving at truth, and of securing our happiness thereby; that Vice is its great enemy, as it incapacitates for a discrimination between what is credible and what otherwise; that Virtue, by its effect on the mind, renders a man so well qualified for such a task, that with due care he will find himself able, notwithstanding the depravity that abounds in the world and his own imperfections, to accomplish it as far as his material interests are concerned. By the same means also will he, as it is lastly in few words to be observed, be enabled to distinguish and estimate truly the Degrees of credibility; and though not minutely, yet, as far as the business and interests of his being demand, to assign unto each that share of reliance to which it is entitled.

Upon the whole then it is to be concluded, in respect to the general question, that Belief in Human Testimony as a Principle of Conduct, no less than as a Principle of Knowledge, is not to be disputed or cavilled at by a reasonable man. Its necessity, and its effects on the welfare of mankind, entitle it to our regard. Its benefits are indeed confined to the wise and prudent. But
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wisdom and prudence have been shewn, and will perhaps hereafter more clearly appear to be the fruit of virtue, and therefore become the necessary duty of every one, and are attainable by all, as far as they are requisite to happiness.

But if we bestow one consideration farther on its tendency to promote our welfare, not to be omitted, we shall still see more just reason to respect it. By banishing ill-founded suspicion from the human breast, it so far removes misery; and, thus restoring serenity, it discovers to view a chearful and bright scene of things, exhibiting it, however less pure than it originally was, still worthy on the whole of its Divine Author, who ever governs by his providence the work which he once pronounced to be good. It thus becomes the parent of Hope, the great and peculiar blessing of man, which relieves his present evils, and heightens his present good by the expectation of "things unseen." It is, moreover, to raise yet higher and, as it were, to sanctify our veneration for it, the parent of Charity, the bond of peace and of all virtue. Being "the substance of things hoped for," it causes a general prejudice in favour of men, from whose abilities and integrity such benefits are to be derived. And, as these ideal substances become realized to us by the exercise of such qualities, it leads our
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minds unto Benevolence and Esteem. From such principles springs every action, that can evince the grateful sense we acquire of such merit : and by this process a mutual interchange of good offices established, as it opens to us all the blessings we need in this world, so it diffuses that spirit and temper of Kindness, which constitute the virtue and effect the happiness of mankind. Nor therefore, lastly, are the benefits of human Faith limited to this world ; since it contributes to qualify us for that state, wherein the benevolence thus begun shall be continued unto perfectness, and the happiness thus derived shall be enlarged beyond our conception, crowned with glory that is unspeakable, and certain for evermore.



S E R M O N III.

R O M. x. 17.

*So then Faith cometh by hearing, and
hearing by the word of God.*

I HAVE, thus far, engaged your attention to the consideration of Faith in respect to *human* testimony alone ; having not adverted any more than by bare intimation to the *Revelations* vouchsafed from Almighty God, or treated of the regard which is due to them. The reason of this is obvious. For since these, where allowed to have been made, by their nature preclude all possibility of doubt, the only question left in this case is about the fact, that such communications have been imparted. To those who immediately received them, or were blessed with any miraculous confirmation of them from the Source of all truth, this question did not belong. But the rest of mankind, who can partake of so high a blessing only by the means of such per-

sons as these, are necessitated to make this inquiry. It is plain therefore, that the main evidence to which our attention and examination are to be directed in all matters of religious Faith, is that of human Testimony; which, as a general subject, has already been treated at some length in the preceding discourses. It now remains, that we should establish the authority of this most important instance of such testimony by those proofs of credibility which have been hitherto adduced.

It is plainly superfluous to spend any time in expatiating on the several Religions that have been professed in the world. Natural Religion, or rather Paganism, in which the witness that the Almighty gave of himself and his will was for the greater part left to each man's reason to perceive and argue from, deserves but little notice. The blindness of understanding, and the depravity of life, which in this sad state of imperfection generally overspread mankind, give us no reason to dwell on the contemplation of it. It was indeed a scene of darkness, and of the shadow of death. Nor is there occasion to be detained on account of the Revelations, by which the Jews, the selected people of God, were honoured. As far as both these systems are pure and genuine, Christianity includes

cludes them, especially the last, which it was so peculiarly designed to fulfil. But considered farther, as entertained in opposition to the truth of Christianity, this cannot require a confutation. Its professors stand convicted by the very records on which their faith entirely depends, at once the proof of the former reasonableness of their profession, and of their present error and obstinacy. These set before us their sensuality, hypocrisy, and love of temporal dominion, which tended to make them adverse to the Gospel of Christ; while, at the same time, by rejecting it they have fulfilled the predictions of the same records, and by their dispersion and miseries still go on to fulfil them unto the day of their general conversion. Absurdity like this cannot be the lot of any but those who were pronounced “a stiff-necked people, that alway resisted the Holy Spirit of God.”

There is only one Religion that remains to be noticed, beside that which is founded on the belief of the Gospel. But as the followers of Mahomet admit the truth of this dispensation, they may be referred, if capable of conviction, to the absolute inconsistency between it and that of their Prophet; at least we cannot but perceive it, and be thereby satisfied of his falsehood. It is, we trust, needless in this

age to argue against a Religion, that has been established by slaughter, maintained by ignorance and lust. Freed from the yoke of Romish heresy, we may, surely, all join in keeping at its present distance the pretensions of the Koran.

Confining ourselves therefore to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the revelations under the Law of Moses as they are subordinately connected with it, we are to consider the claim they have to be received as "the word of God."

But, before that we apply the reasoning hitherto followed, it will be necessary to observe whether the term "Faith" in Holy Scripture is referable to the senses which it bears in common use, and follows the same method of derivation from primary to subsequent acceptations. And, if the determination of the meaning of words is expedient in any system of knowledge, in matters of Religion it is of the greatest concern, as the consequences of a mistake in this particular have too well shewn,

My text, to produce no more among the multitude that occur, establishes that original signification which the definition at first set forth,

forth, shewing that it means simply to give credit to a relation by another person. The words immediately preceding and connected with the present, demonstrate this plainly without any need of comment. The Apostle there quoting from Isajah asks, " Lord, who hath believed " our report ?" * and thence infers in the text, " so then Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The same thing also is clearly pointed out in the beginning of the chapter, where speaking expressly of the faith which justifies the world, he calls it " the " Word of Faith which he preached," adding, that he who " confessed with his mouth the " Lord Jesus, and believed in his heart that " God had raised him from the dead, should " be saved."

As also the belief of any thing important to us necessarily affects our wishes and desires, and becomes a principle of action, it on this account obtains here, as in the lesser concerns of a temporal kind, the farther signification which has been noticed. In this sense, to produce no more instances, it is used throughout the greatest part of the eleventh chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the exploits of the great men in the earlier periods of the

* See also Joh. xii. 37, 38, &c.

Jewish history are enumerated. But this, and the meanings connected with it, will hereafter be treated of. I shall only mention farther, that the term in Scripture often likewise denotes, beside the assent of the mind to the Gospel, the Gospel itself or Subject Matter of belief. In this acceptation it occurs in Gal. i. 23. where the Apostle adverts to his having "preached the "Faith which once he destroyed;" and in a known passage, where the Ephesians are reminded that they had "one Lord, one Faith, one "Baptism," and in the other texts of Scripture.*

That the books of the Old and New Testament, which are esteemed canonical by our Church, have a full claim to the title of writings dictated by the Holy Spirit of God, we assert to be sufficiently manifest from every evidence with which we could expect in such a case to be favoured; because they are recommended to our belief by the strongest proofs that prevail with us in any similar matter of importance that at any time engages us. And we are now warranted to assert that he who demands more evidence than this, which is afforded, forgets that he steps beyond his own sphere; and is not aware that he gives a proof of his being led by motives incon-

* Such as Rom. xiv. 22, 23. comp. ver. 2, 5, 14.

sistent with wisdom, common prudence, and, too probably, with sincerity.

In considering this question with regard to the books of the New Testament, it is evidently resolvable into two articles; Whether they were written by the persons whose names they bear, and whether such writers were credible witnesses of the matters which they relate. With this last is connected also another question; whether they were secured by the spirit of God from error in the doctrine which they themselves taught. I say, two articles; for I do not mean to enter here into the great question which yet remains; but think it enough to assert that if the Miracles, and the facts that were the completion of former Prophecies, are rightly recorded of our Saviour, the truth of the Gospel-Dispensation is fully established. The subject is copious, and has been satisfactorily discussed by perhaps a greater number of able writers than any other.

As to the first, we are to consider whether there are all the proofs of the authenticity of these records, which we can have for that of any records of moment equally ancient. In examples of this kind we are not absurdly to expect, that they should be witnessed by the evidence of
those

those who saw the books during the time at which they were written, or of those who themselves saw all the manuscripts, or of any such express testimony. It is to be considered, that these are rendered superfluous, and are indeed implied in the universal reception of the books among such as existed in and nearest to those times. Our reception of their testimony is, in this instance, warranted on the satisfactory supposition of a proper and sufficient examination, by persons who must be believed to have satisfied themselves by a direct or ample proof, unless we could suppose men at that time void of common curiosity or interest about that which so greatly concerned them, or destitute of common sense and judgment. As to worldly regards which might induce to imposture, beside the impossibility of success under the circumstances of this case, these, it will be shewn, were all on the other side of the question. From this beginning therefore their reception became extended unto general belief, which is demonstrated by the many writers who have mentioned them without contradiction and dispute in different times and countries. In some the names occur of the authors of the several books, and in others extracts made from them. Such testimony, in its progress through successive ages, at each repetition adds no simple or numerical confirmation of their authenticity; as it implies that, during each interval, time, the great
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test of truth and falsehood, had as yet brought nothing to detect the fraud imposed. And thus, after so many centuries, he has put his seal to their character, a seal which no doubt or surmise of a later period may presume to tear off or deface.

As to the Internal Evidence, as it is called, I presume to suggest that it is a subject of caution. For, indulged as it frequently is, it becomes only a source of endless contention between men of different taste and humour. If the External Evidence be clear, and not plainly contradicted by it, I should think but little attention due to him, who should question the want of similarity in style between compositions of the same author, especially if they be of a different date, or raise any other such precarious questions, concluding thence a probability of their not being genuine. It may be presumed that multitudes of others must have been judges of such matters before : and it is evident that at a long distance of time we may be deprived of a great number of particulars, which would serve, if known, to account for slight or even considerable irregularities. It is idle therefore and unwise to disturb, on such accounts, a belief in points that have been in this manner ascertained and established. Nor in questions of the highest import to our temporal affairs do the wisest men allow any room to such presumption.

It

It would be indeed universally condemned, if a dispenser of human Laws should pronounce against an ancient Charter, which had been constantly and generally acknowledged, on the pretence that there were some particulars in it, about which men of different ability, skill, or disposition, held, and were ever likely to hold, different opinions.

The other proposition concerning the writings of the New Testament, respects the Writers themselves, namely, whether they may be believed in what they relate and teach. This also has been often largely and most clearly proved in the affirmative. And especially as to the first: if we admit their own account of themselves and each other, which is of such a kind that, I think, no man can see the least reason to doubt it; stating, as we find, that they were ordinary men, no way distinguished from the common mass of the Jews, partaking of the same prejudice, spiritual ignorance, and slowness of belief with others, unlearned, timid, not possessed of quickness either of fancy or understanding; recording, as it does, their own faulty conduct, and unaffectedly reserved as to their good actions: if we admit, I say, such an account given by these men of themselves, which has also, I believe, never been disproved by any testimony, we cannot but instantly
allow

allow them to have been credible witnesses of what they have reported ; remembering likewise, that the facts and doctrines which constitute the chief evidence, and compose the main substance of the Christian dispensation, were such as were perfectly adapted and level to their perception. Had they been men of a subtle fancy, that had either been misled by sophistry or the opinions of any sect or school of philosophy ; or had they been possessed by a spirit of enthusiasm ; both the events and precepts **which** they recorded, might have been thought liable to misconception, and to an injurious, though even an unintentional, adulteration. Again, if the doctrines had been abstruse or prolix, or on subjects foreign from their habitual apprehensions ; or if the facts had been in any shape difficult of observation ; another pretence of objection might have been started. But when both were wonderfully suited to their temper, and to their circumstances ; and were moreover many of them repeated at different times, and all firmly and accurately fixed in their minds by mutual conversation among themselves and their numerous adherents ; every shadow of doubt respecting their ability as witnesses must vanish from our sight.

Or if we consider their Sincerity, this is far beyond any possibility of question. Where they were incapable of contriving a system of Religion,

ligion, and unqualified to teach one, it is merely absurd to suppose that they should farther assert a number of facts which they knew to be false, which they could not hope to succeed in making believed, and which depriving them of all comfort in this life, and, in all probability, of life itself, must also subject them to the displeasure and judgments of God, as well as to the hatred and contempt of mankind. It would be to suppose that they could act against every principle of nature which ever led men either to good actions or to bad. Surely here is an accumulation of obstacles in the way of insincerity, which at least any number of plain men would, I should say, could never contend against in one uniform tenor of conduct, without any wavering or inconsistency, to the end of their lives, and at least seal their testimony with their blood. Well therefore might the Apostles appeal with boldness to their converts in those numerous passages, wherein they claimed, from such resistless arguments as above, a confidence due to indisputable knowledge of what they related, and to an unimpeachable integrity in the communication of it.*

If therefore the Facts and Doctrines related of our Saviour by his Apostles have been truly

* John xxi. 24.—xx. 30, 31. 1 John i. 1. 2 Cor. xi. xii. 1 Thess. ii. 3, &c. Philipp. ii. 20, 21, 22. 29, 30. Gal. i. 9, 10, &c.

reported; and the same arguments are applicable to the transactions subsequent to our Lord's ascension; it only remains to enquire, in the last place, whether the Doctrines delivered in their own name afterwards to the Christian Church, were always guarded from error by the controul of the Spirit of God. Now this is to be plainly demonstrated by two clear arguments; perhaps by many others; and, first, by the spirit and analogy of those declarations of our Saviour, "that he would be with them to the end of the world;" "that they were sent by him as he was sent by the Father;" "that he would send to them the Holy Spirit to teach them all things," to reveal whatever "he should receive and hear" from the Father, and that, "not in proverbs, but plainly," "to guide them into all truth," even that which before "they could not bear," "to shew them things to come," and, for these and other great purposes, to abide with them for ever." And, secondly, we may argue from the plain necessity which existed that those, who were fully commissioned with every demonstration of the Holy Spirit, and particularly the power of miracles, who were sent to preach a new Religion, and to found new Churches among heathen nations, who were accordingly received "as the Angel of God, as Christ Jesus," should not teach any

* Gal. iv. 14.

thing that was not true. This topic might be advantageously displayed at large.

But a proof of our position is, I think, to be found in St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, from which a celebrated passage has, most idly, been adduced against it. A plain and short account of the matter is this. The Apostle (ch. 7.) is advising his converts on the subject of marriage, with reference to the state of persecution in which they were then involved: in doing which, at the 10th verse, where he speaks of the separation of a wife from her husband, or of the husband from the wife, which is forbidden; he premises, that not he but "the Lord" here commands them. Immediately afterwards, at the 12th, he resumes his own person, and proceeds to give them special directions, suited to their particular circumstances; concerning which he remarks, in the 25th verse, that he had "no commandment of "the Lord." He concludes, at the end of the chapter, by saying that he spoke according to his own opinion, and adds, "I think that also I "have the Spirit of God." Now I first assert, that this declaration is, in this place, on the face of it, free from any intimation of doubt; * and

* Δοκῶν signifying simply *to be of opinion*, means any degree of persuasion, the strongest as well as the weakest, and therefore must receive its interpretation from the context of each place where it occurs. xiv. 37. Gal. ii. 9.—See also 2 Cor. xi. 5. where λογίζομαι is in a similar predicament.

is an expression claiming what he had undoubtedly a right to be believed to have, in common with the rest of the Apostles, as one who, as he said before, and in another epistle more largely asserts, had found mercy of the Lord to become a faithful teacher of his word. And the reason of this manner of address is, evidently, to be found in the occasion he had to vindicate his authority, especially to these converts. How great this occasion was, must appear fully to every one on the perusal of this epistle, which abounds with vindications of it, and was chiefly written with that design. Of this we shall soon observe another instance.

But concerning the distinction made by St. Paul, in the passages here cited, between his own advice and the commands of Christ, it is pertinent to offer, in few words, a remark on its meaning, which, I think, is well founded. If we consider the subject matter of these different injunctions, it will occur that the one, which is here termed the command of the Lord, is a rule of moral conduct founded on the nature of man, and therefore universal and permanent; whereas those in which St. Paul gives his own sentiments, are particular, and the application of general rules to special cases. Such a difference of itself, indeed, perhaps leads to no sufficient reason why the Apostle should be favoured with a particular

ticular revelation in such a point, and at the same time should not receive a direction in the others, which were matters of great and urgent importance. But this difficulty vanishes, if we suppose that he never received, as he never wanted, any such revelation at all in those last points of doctrine, because he was under the constant controul of the Holy Spirit. And this will appear probable, if we reflect farther on the command of the Lord, with which he was here furnished, that it is in fact no other than a precept which was delivered by our Saviour during his abode on earth. It is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, and was one among the fundamental laws of Christianity, distinguishing it from the law of Moses, and the practices of the Heathens. Why St. Paul has expressed himself in so particular and strong a manner of speech, that it has induced some to think it a new and occasional revelation, it seems also obvious to deduce from his peculiar situation. To the rest of the Apostles, who had been personally witnesses of their Master's doctrines, the Holy Spirit had occasion, if we may so speak, only to bring back all that might have escaped their memory. But to St. Paul, who was a stranger to such an advantage, the Divine Comforter was altogether to reveal every part of those doctrines : * and therefore,

* Gal. i. 12, &c. Eph. iii. 3. 7.

in addressing his converts on this point, he speaks of this precept as of a command imparted from Heaven, and does not, as the other Apostles might have done, refer to it as an old standing Rule of Christian morality.

This account of the passage in question, if just, takes away those inferences that have been drawn to the disparagement of apostolical inspiration; and, at least, leaves the matter open to a determination from argument, and from other texts of Scripture; such as that subsequent assertion of St. Paul, which has been cited, beside those of the same and of the other Apostles, which might be produced. But, if the matter could be no otherwise put out of all question, it would be sufficient to consider what he has farther said in the 14th chapter of this epistle, where in most express terms he asserts this title to their submission. In the 36th verse, immediately after having concluded various orders relating to the service of the church, with which he had proceeded from the 10th chapter, he breaks forth suddenly into this expostulation on their arrogance; "What! came the word of God from you? or has it reached unto you only?" And then, though the precepts he had given had not been in the number of those delivered by Christ on earth, yet, evidently because they were dictated by his Spirit, he speaks of

them here unreservedly as the Lord's commands, similarly as he had in the tenth chapter done of the gospel rule respecting divorce. "If any man think himself to be a Prophet or spiritual, i. e. informed by the Spirit, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." And the reason of his giving them now this character, which he had before appropriated in distinction from them to the laws of the Gospel, appears from the context of the passage, wherein it is used specifically against such as from a pretension, whether true or false, of their being also inspired, raised themselves up against his authority. To these particular persons, in order to correct their haughtiness and ambition, he speaks in that high yet just manner, which in general he did not use. To the rest, not being under the same necessity, his modesty also induces him not to wish to mention it. "But if any man be ignorant," or, does not pretend to such illumination, I leave him to his ignorance, which he is ready to acknowledge, as well as to allow the authority of an Apostle, who is commissioned, with the evidence of miracles, to teach and direct in all things relating to the Gospel of Christ.

I think that we are warranted, from these passages, to conclude the Apostles to have been, in all points whatever of religious doctrine, and

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at all times, under the controul of the Holy Spirit. It would probably appear to militate against the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, to suppose the contrary. But all farther arguments on the subject are superfluous, after so plain and unequivocal an assertion of the Apostle, with which we may leave the question.

The proof of the Authenticity and Accuracy of the books of the New Testament, and with them, as was before assumed, of the Truth of the Gospel Dispensation, is thus complete. Many additional arguments, indeed, still remain to add unto the conviction of the sincere Christian; such as, being unnecessary to the deliberate reason of one who is able to judge of its pretensions, are graciously indulged by Him, who knows what is in man, and provides for the wants of all. Above the rest of this kind is the fulfilment of its predictions, especially that great and singular one of the destruction of Jerusalem, and its consequences. Among them is also the reception of it by the good, the learned, and the wise, who are entitled by their ability and integrity to throw an additional credit on it; a credit which, as hath been shewn, has a just and powerful influence on our minds; and which has been wanting, in any degree of comparison, to the cause of Infidelity. It may not be unseasonable also to sub-

join here the visible effect of Christianity on the private and public conduct of those who profess it; I mean, in the first place, with sincerity and perfectness of mind. I speak of this, as it appeals at once to the unreflecting perception of such as are personal witnesses of a truly Christian conduct; which, opposed to the surrounding examples of other religions, is indeed "a light shining in a dark place." Nor is this evidence, though alas! far less bright, at all obscure and doubtful in the case of the imperfect professors of the Gospel, and of the general state of Christian nations. A more lively and correct sense of the duties to God and man, at least, is discernible in them, and is the cause of no mean and unimportant effect. But, to contemplate both these last arguments in their most advantageous point of view, we should consider the success and efficacy of the Gospel in the earlier period of its existence, before the time of its civil establishment under Constantine; when both were produced by the single, native energy of celestial truth, unmingled with the subordinate influence of human sanctions. During this æra of three hundred years, its progress in the world, unless because it was the word of God, was in defiance of all experience, and unaccountable from any principle or assignable cause. It did not accord with the desire of power, or reputation, or wealth, or pleasure; but in every respect excluded them all.

all. Unlike the Pagan, Mahometan, or even the Jewish Religions, it derived no root or increase from any seed contained in our corrupt nature, from the prospect of external gratifications, or the more refined, yet sensual heat and vigour of enthusiasm. The success was indisputably then the work of God alone; who, as he created at first all worlds out of nothing, chose also to produce the regeneration of his creatures, and establish his new kingdom on earth, without the interference of any human cause, choosing "the weak things to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," and "making his strength perfect only in weakness."

I shall not at present enter on the other great topic, which has been by some much used to establish the authority of the Gospel as well as the authenticity of the Books relating to it, namely, the Internal Evidence of its doctrines; but reserve this for a separate consideration.

It is likewise almost needless to say any thing in proof of the Old Testament; as this may safely rest its pretensions on the reception of the New. The quotations in this last from the law and other books, the constant mention of them, the allowance by the Jews of all the passages argued

argued on by our Lord and his Disciples, and, lastly, the acknowledgement of the Mosaical Dispensation throughout the Gospel, entitle it to our unquestionable belief of its Authenticity and Authority. To which might be added, on the first head, the acquiescence of all past ages, the quotations by the Fathers of succeeding centuries, the coincidence of the copies still preserved by the Jewish Nation, the conformity of it with the most ancient versions, especially with the Septuagint; and the like. It is to be observed therefore, that it is of no consequence whether the several books were written by the persons to whom we attribute them, or composed from their instruction by others, or after what particular manner committed to writing: since what has received the sanction of the Gospel, or in other terms of the Spirit of God, must be received as worthy of all credit in its doctrine and narrative. With such questions as these the imprudent and idle fancy of some men is apt to busy itself; but how vainly, not only the above consideration might shew, but also, if it be reflected on, the obvious impossibility that they could ever at this distance of time be certainly determined. For the same reasons also I shall not dwell on those confirmations that appear to arise from its Internal Evidence; the simplicity, and at the same time gravity, and dignity of its style;

style ; its candour in relating the faults as well as excellencies of its great men ; the generally apparent suitableness of its transactions and precepts to the attributes of the supreme Author of all ; its consistency with the best ancient history and with itself ; and other topics of this kind which have been so often amply and excellently enlarged on ; or lastly, that which should be regarded in a different and superior light, the relation between the ritual of the Law and its antitypes in the Gospel, between the several prophecies under the old dispensation and their accomplishment under the new ; which are so perpetually and so intimately connected with each other, that it would be absurd to suppose the two systems separable, or the one true and the other false,

To conclude : if it can then be shewn that, from the External Evidence of both scriptures, their claim to the title of God's Word is founded on reasons so clear and strong, that it is impossible that they should not be received as such by any honest mind ; we may venture to ascribe to this evidence a conviction as satisfactory as the conclusions of Science, agreeably to what was said before of the highest degree of credibility in matters of Faith. And we are persuaded that the Veracity and Ability of the witnesses, in respect

spect to the Authenticity and Fidelity of the sacred volume, and to the Pretensions of the Gospel-Dispensation, will stand, on the fullest investigation, ascertained to us by the concurrence of all the proofs that are applicable to the case. And thus, in a concern of such high moment, it has pleased God to afford such testimony to mankind, that neither the ignorance nor weakness of any man might debar him from perceiving the force of it, when offered to him. This we are taught to expect, not only from reason, but from his declarations in ^{the} Holy Writ. Of the Gospel it was peculiarly foretold; a prediction expressly declared by our Lord to have been fulfilled, that it was to be preached unto "the Poor.†" On the same account also, a great accession of Internal Evidence has certainly been bestowed, to give every argument in its favour that the nature of the case would admit.

But to the Critic and Philosopher all these various proofs, as it hath been intimated, were not necessary. To them, who were raised above the bulk of mankind in wisdom and learning, and could have leisure from the cares of life to revolve and estimate in their minds the different arguments in favour of Christianity; to them a

* Deut. xxx. 10—14, 15, 19, which is applied to the Gospel; Rom. x. 8.

† Matt. xi. 5. Luke iv. 21.

few essential ones would have been sufficient, to cut off from them all excuse and reason of unbelief. Nay, to proceed yet farther; it will become at least such to consider what ought to have been their conduct, if it had pleased God that these evidences, in their case, should have amounted to a much slighter conviction; or even if they had been such, that the arguments for and against the authenticity of the Gospel had been very nearly balanced: even then they would have to reply to the argument of an excellent Writer,* which has proved that it would be utterly unwise, according to every idea of human wisdom, to hesitate between the admission or rejection of a plan, that if followed, might possibly lead to an eternity of celestial happiness, and, if not adopted might doom to accursed, everlasting misery. For it is well known, that matters of the greatest importance to our earthly welfare often rest on a slight preponderation of probability in favour of the choice which we have made; and that a man's wisdom is never called into question because he acts on such an evidence. He would certainly be esteemed to act against his reason, if he refused or neglected to follow the light of that evidence, though ever so faint and glimmering, when his view on the opposite side is at least more

* Bp. Butler's Introduction to the Analogy of religion, and part ii. c. 6. See also Pascal, *Pensées sur la Religion*, c. 7.

dark.

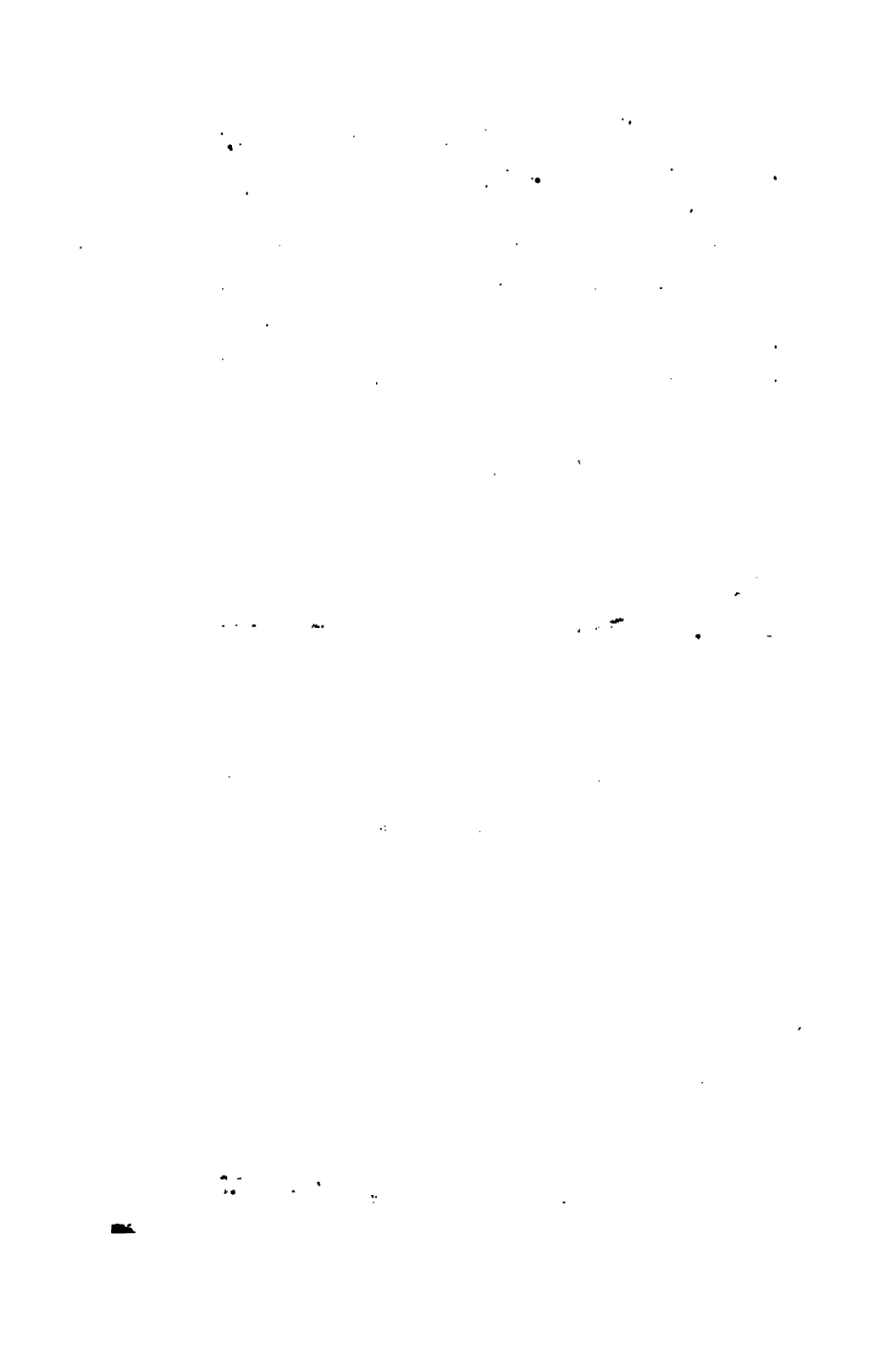
dark. And particularly is this reasoning just, if we reflect that here he has only an alternative, and no medium ; cannot steer a neutral way, or keep back from both, but must choose the one or the other ; must tread the path that points to endless glory and bliss, or fall into the way that threatens to lead unto endless ruin.

We must now therefore, I think, inevitably conclude in this case with the great Evangelist, that he who refuses or hesitates to follow the light that shines before him, must have some secret motive for doing so, different in its kind from reason and conviction : that therefore his passions, evil habits, or worldly interest incline him to the other side. But I should not say with the Evangelist alone, for the conclusion is warranted by innumerable texts, and indeed the whole tenor of both Scriptures.* This is that most important object of consideration which has been before noticed, and deserves to be ever deeply entertained in our minds ; which we shall still, as we proceed, see more reason to dread as the great and criminal cause of Mental Perversion. May we be induced by reflection on its tendency and power to guard against its influence ; and to draw fearfully back from the fellowship and reasonings of those who misled by this in-

* One instance may be sufficient. Heb. iii. 6—14.

ternal guide, thus alas ! walk through the mists of error and disbelief unto the shadow of death ! who are pronounced to be under the dreadful condemnation of such as " hate the light, neither come to the light lest their deeds be reproved ;" on this account " loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil*."

* Joh. iii. 19, 20.



S E R M O N IV.

I C O R. II. 5.

That your Faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

AFTER that it has been once fully and clearly ascertained by any kind of proof, that a system of doctrines must have been revealed by Almighty God, it may, surely, be judged unnecessary, in strictness of argument, to push an enquiry any farther. In such a predicament stands the question concerning the advantage to be derived from the Internal Evidence of the Gospel. Of whatever use this evidence may be, and it is, undoubtedly, of great importance, yet, if applied, singly or chiefly, to prove the truth of that dispensation, it is ill adapted to such a purpose, and never was designed to effect it. The accomplishment of Prophecy, and the achievement of Miracles were the true criteria which our Lord brought forward against the
Jews,

Jews, and on which he rested his pretensions.* The same attestations, when proved to have been recorded and communicated to us by credible witnesses, are the basis on which our Christian Faith now stands. Internal Evidence therefore is, in this regard, superfluous; and, as it hath been in some measure shewn, if too much depended upon, would be a precarious and dangerous support. It follows that great care is to be taken, with what views and intention we set ourselves to read the matters contained in the Old and New Testament. It is to be constantly remembered that we should not institute, primarily, an enquiry into their truth or falshood, into their reasonableness or the contrary; but rather, a research, so far as we are necessarily concerned, into their meaning and import. Absolute and palpable impossibility, or irreconcilable contradiction, would indeed distress us; but with these we should recollect that we are morally certain not to meet; and, we may add, no man of credit ever pretended to have detected such in them. While the only question then respects the appearances of these, concerning which different men from various causes hold different opinions, we are to remember that they are not matters that affect the admissibility of the Scriptures, and our submission by Faith and Obedience to that

* Joh. v. 32, 36, 39, 46.

which

which is clearly revealed. It would indeed be a mark of gross ignorance or negligence not to be aware, that in writings which treat of persons and things infinitely removed in nature, equally imperceptible by our senses and reflection, as also in a simple, concise, and irregular narrative of facts that commence with the creation of the world, there must be difficulties in many points: and therefore, if where they occur, they sometimes surpass our ability to remove them, they can have no effect against our Belief. For, according to what has been said, some points may be inexplicable because our limited nature is incapable of them; others because we are not in possession of means whereby they might be investigated; and, again, a third class may remain obscure because it is the will and purpose of God that we should be imperfectly instructed in them. For of such a kind is the method which he has declared himself sometimes to adopt for the trial of man's sincerity: * and his counsels who shall judge? Upon the whole, a system perfectly and in all its parts clear of all difficulties it would be contrary to reason and analogy to expect. † Nor may we expostulate with the Most High because every person is not in all ages miraculously assisted in the perusal of the Holy Writings, and infallibly secured from error; or because heresies are

* Matt. xiii. 10, &c.

† See Bp. Butler's Work before cited.

permitted to disturb and perplex mankind. I do not say that a reason for this method of his Providence has not been given, since it has now been mentioned and ought to be humbly and thankfully received, but not unto disputation.

It is therefore, I think, to be concluded, that, in strictness of reasoning, while there is not in revelation any point, of which we are adequate to judge, that is either plainly contradictory or impossible, all question relating to the perfect admissibility of the Old and New Testament is unjustifiable. If any man in the perusal of them thinks that he meets with a confirmation of his Faith from the nature of the matters contained, and especially from the goodness and wisdom of the moral doctrines, let him be thankful and happy. There are undoubtedly most numerous and important confirmations of this kind, the value of which it must be far from any one's wish to set aside or diminish. But let him remember that his Faith in and submission to them stand originally on another foundation, which cannot be shaken, the assurance already attained that these doctrines do really come from God. And therefore though it is certain that nothing but what is good can come from such a cause, yet it is of infinite consequence to him to consider that he is not an adequate judge of all that is good ; that he is man and not God ; and therefore
fore

fore that he has no right to raise any doubt or difficulty in the way of his Faith because he is at any time unable to reconcile any matter to his notions of fitness and propriety : “ that his Faith “ stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the “ power of God.”

We may lay it down therefore, that the Holy Scriptures are in all their parts a trial of virtue to man, in one respect or other ; in those that are difficult and inexplicable, of his humility ; in those that appear evident, of his piety ; in those that seem reasonable and excellent, of his gratitude. But though this be the case, yet we daily see that there are men who will perplex themselves and the world on these subjects ; and will even raise such objections as claim our notice, affirming that some articles generally derived by Christians from the Scriptures are not contained in them, and that others, which appear to be so, are impossible or absurd. These charges I purpose to consider in a few of those instances wherein they have been chiefly urged ; confining myself in this discourse to the great mysteries which the Gospel has revealed to our Faith, and reserving the consideration of the Moral Law, and of the Oeconomy of the Gospel, unto the next opportunity.

On the subject of the mysteries which the gospel enjoins us to believe, I begin with observing that, suitably to the gracious purpose of the Almighty toward man, they are plain and easy as far as he is required to know them ; and, likewise, that they are few in number. At the time when the Jewish and Pagan Religions divided the world, it was sufficient to comprise Christianity under the Belief that the commission which Jesus Christ bore was truly from God. "To believe," "to become a believer," "to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and such other phrases, form the whole description of it that we constantly meet with in the New Testament. They served to point out the party that was adopted, and were as a token or watch word, by which the members of the new sect were separated from the rest of mankind. But that, at the same time, under these symbols it was virtually declared that the Faith of Christians was to extend unto every article which their teacher should propose, is necessarily evident : for it is included in the confession that he was a teacher sent from God, the only ground of their becoming his disciples. This is also to be proved, if so plain and obvious a point required it, by the variety of those forms under which this original description of a Christian was comprised. Beside those mentioned ; "to *believe the Gos-

* Mark xvi. 15, 16,

“pel,” “* to believe that Jesus Christ is the
 “Son of God,” “†to believe the only true God
 “and Jesus Christ whom he had sent,” and
 other texts of this kind, unless they stood only for
 a general reference to the whole of the system
 contained in the Gospel, must have marked out
 different boundaries of Faith, and given rise
 to different sects of Believers, instead of uniting
 them all under “one Lord, one Faith, one Bap-
 “tism.” While however a Christian’s Faith is
 indispensably extended to every thing contained
 in the Holy Scriptures, we are to observe that
 the articles which he is most concerned in,
 those which our Lord and his Apostles lay most
 stress upon, are but few, and easily remembered.
 Such are the Being and Nature of God, the In-
 carnation of the second Person, his Sufferings and
 Death, his Resurrection and Ascension, the Ope-
 ration of the Holy Spirit, the twofold future
 State of Glory and of Torment, and such like,
 And as they are few in number, so it has pleased
 God that they should be fully and expressly re-
 vealed, and, as far as we are designed to know
 them, intelligible by all.

This position, though, as I have said, it is not
 within the limits of a discourse to prove from
 every instance, I hope to render highly probable
 by a view of one or two among the principal

* Acts viii. 37.

† Joh. xvii. 3.

ones; and especially hope to shew that the method of interpretation which objectors to the doctrines received have usually adopted, is the faulty source of their mistakes; being contrary to that which the Apostle contends for in this Epistle. For, as he observes here and elsewhere, “the doctrine of the Gospel is the wisdom not “of man but of God.” The redemption of mankind by the incarnation and death of Christ was a plan to which no worldly wisdom could ever lead, and was to be learned only by the revelation which the Spirit of God should make of it. The information concerning the heavenly mysteries thus disclosed, was conveyed by the preachers of it, not in words and reasonings according to any human philosophy, but in language which the Spirit dictated, representing the things which the Spirit thus made known, by those words, and that usage of words, which the Spirit directed and assigned. Revelation and philosophy were not commensurate, or the language and reasonings of one applicable to the other. On account of this disparity, the greatest ability and proficiency in human learning would never enable men to receive these great truths of the Gospel, which were to be conveyed by a channel of instruction to which they were strangers: while, on the other hand, the man thus informed of them by the Spirit of God could thoroughly discern the comparative ignorance and folly

folly of the philosopher, though, for the reason above stated, he was beyond the reach of the other's knowledge and judgment of him. For what philosopher, what human wit can find out the counsels of the Most High? They can be no otherwise known but by the communication of the Son.* "But we," concludes the Apostle, "have the mind of Christ."† Are we not to infer from this account, that a humble submission to the Scripture is then to be our only guide also unto whatever we can at all know of these truths; that, depending solely on it, we must confine ourselves in its interpretation, and the reasonings we deduce from it, within the limits which it has marked out, both in regard to the subjects, and the manner or degree in which we are designed to perceive and know them?

To proceed: The first concern in all Religion, surely, is to know what are the Objects of worship. It is difficult to conceive that any persons should not agree to the importance of such a decision; as it is evident that to give adoration where it is not due, or to withhold it where it is, are equally inconsistent with the piety of man. On the other hand, we are ready, for the same reason, to allow, that the revelation of such a point must of plain necessity have been very

* Matt. xi. 27. Luke x. 22.

† 1 Cor. ii. 5—16.

clearly

clearly and fully made. Accordingly, first, it is to be observed that the Holy Scriptures throughout the Old Testament are full of the most express and solemn declarations that there is "one God," which was the first article of the Decalogue delivered on Mount Sinai. The same great truth is also professed by the Gospel, wherein our blessed Saviour speaks of the Almighty as his God,* and offers prayer and worship to him;† and particularly in the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel, where are these words; "This is life eternal that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

In due conformity with this primary article of Faith, the New Testament usually speaks of Jesus Christ as Man, and without reference to him as any other than a Prophet who was endowed with the Holy Spirit without measure. And it is alway to be remembered, that man he certainly was, born of a woman, of the house and lineage of David. This it is of the highest importance to remark and fix in our minds, for it accounts for and justifies every phrase and expression in the Scriptures where he is spoken of simply as the "Son of Man," and every consequence that has ensued, or can be deduced from the human nature of Christ.

* Joh. xx. 17.

† Luke vi. 12.

But

But to pursue this subject with all plainness and freedom of enquiry: the same authority, the Oracles of God, and our Saviour himself, in the next place, inform us as expressly of another proposition; which we are, for the same reason, as much bound to believe. They tell us, among many other passages which seem to lead our minds to a different notion of this extraordinary Person, that he existed “before the world.”* An assertion this, which of itself is enough to prepare a Christian for receiving whatever else he may find to be revealed. It takes the Saviour of mankind at once out of our sight, when we also consider the prophecies concerning him, and the history of his miraculous birth, and elevates him beyond our comprehension of his nature. Our experience leads to no idea, and our reason is not sufficient to form any. All therefore that we have now to learn of the twofold constitution of the man Christ Jesus is become matter of religious Faith. Being led to expect a farther account of him, we are diligently to enquire after it, and to receive it, whatever it may be, with humility and simplicity of mind. Now, in the chapter† of St. John’s Gospel above cited, we find himself farther mentioning the state of “glory” which he had “with” the “Father;” nay, in another place, asserting that this existence was not only before the world, but similar to that of

* Joh. xvii. 5.

† Ch. xvii.

God, namely eternal. I speak here of those celebrated words in the eighth chapter, "Before Abraham was, I am;" which, as it appears plainly from the spirit of that whole conversation, the preceding parts of the context, the circumstances of the persons to whom they were spoken and their reception of them, as well as the grammatical construction, must unavoidably be understood in this sense. We can at the same time spare them; for again, in another dispute with the Jews, on being charged with a violation of the sabbath, he argues in this manner; "my Father does not rest on the sabbath-day, and as his Son I am therefore also not obliged."* How he designed to be understood, if the plain purport of this argument did not shew,† is evident from the resentment with which the Jews received it, considering it as a greater crime than the violation of the sabbath; "For this cause then the Jews sought yet more to kill him, because he had not only transgressed the law, but had even called God his own father, making himself equal with God."‡ To the same effect is another memorable conversation, recorded in the tenth chapter. But to go on: St. Paul, in the opening of his Epistle to the Hebrews, setting

* Joh. v. 17.

† For it is necessarily and simply this; that he was not, in the divine part of his nature, a *servant*, and was *in right* entitled to the same privileges with the supreme God, *as being of the self-same nature*.

‡ See also John x. 30. 33.

forth Christ's exaltation above the Angels after his ascension, shews at length, expressly, the great truth we receive, by an application of the words of the Psalmist: "To the Angels he (i. e. God) "saith, who maketh his Angels spirits, and his Ministers a flaming fire;" but to the Son, "thy Throne, *O God*, is for ever and "ever." And St. John closes the proofs here selected, by the most express and purposed avowal of the Divine Nature of Christ in the exordium of his Gospel, in opposition to those Heretics of his own time who denied it.

Thus, by a few instances, and those not chosen with any particular reason of preference over very many of equal clearness and strength, is this second article of Faith shewn to be fully and explicitly revealed from Heaven. Beside the Texts which I have thus omitted, I am also obliged to pass by the confirmation of them all by the testimony of the Fathers of the Church, who inform us that such was understood to be the doctrine of the Gospel in the earliest ages. But both these, as well as such Proofs as I have produced, have been often and ably brought forward to public view: so that the doctrine, instead of being in the least doubtful, is, what I particularly aimed at shewing, evident to the common understanding of every Christian who has it fairly proposed

proposed to him. It is indeed too often, alas ! evident to men of plain sense, far more than to many others of the highest rank in literature ; for the same cause, for which, as it is easy to shew, and has been before intimated, the reason of men has but little share in the opposition that has been made unto it.

The only objection that, as I think, is applicable on this statement, is derived from a circumstance observable in the texts produced ; namely, that they are gradual and progressive. It is asked, why do we not meet not only with adequate but the most express declarations possible of our Lord's Divinity in the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, or St. Luke, and in the very beginning of those Gospels ? Why are these rather reserved to St. Paul and St. John so many years afterwards ? It will perhaps conduce to make us think lightly of the arguments against our Faith, if the futility of this objection be exposed. Indeed, allowing it to be true that the assertions of these later Apostles are more direct and explicit, and we might safely grant more in this argument, the answer strictly should be, " Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or " who hath been his counsellor ? " Sufficient is it for us to know that the Providence of God hath ordained it so to be. His reason for such an arrangement, if it be communicated, is a
matter

matter of favour; and therefore, if withheld, as we cannot hope to know it, we are equally obliged to believe what he hath revealed without it. But perhaps, for opinions on such matters must be produced with diffidence, the reason may be collected from some passages in Scripture. We are therein told that it is the method of Divine Providence to impart instruction to men by degrees, accordingly as their knowledge, temper, and circumstances fit them for receiving it. Thus our Lord, as well as his Apostle St. Paul, teaches the Jews that the Mosaical Law was constituted after a manner suitable “to the hardness of their hearts,*” that it was involved with “the beggarly elements†” of truth, and was as “a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ‡.” In another place He tells his own Disciples before his passion, even under the Gospel, after three years instruction, that he had many things to say unto them, but they could not then bear them; nor until the Holy Spirit should have descended upon them.§ It would again be therefore enough to silence all objection on this head if we replied, that the Almighty had possibly, not to say probably, a similar reason for observing a gradation in this instance; for it would be incumbent on the opposer to

* Matt. xix. 8.

† Gal. iv. 9.

‡ Gal. iii. 23, 24. 1 Cor. iii. 2. Heb. v. 11, 12.

§ Joh. xvi. 12, 13.

shew he could not, which is, I think, clearly out of his power. The argument therefore might safely stop here. But we might perhaps not be mistaken if we were also to suggest, as we well may, that the Jews were at this period so bigotted to the letter of the Mosaical Law, to the promises of a temporal kingdom under the Messias, and consequently against the meanness of Christ's appearance, that a direct assertion of this tenet at the commencement of the Gospel, must have not only had the effect of rendering them all, even his own disciples, incapable of believing it, but would have exasperated them beyond all bounds, and have cut off at once all intercourse between the Saviour and those to whom he was sent. I do not here speak from conjecture, but appeal to fact. The superstitious reverence in which they held the Incommunicable Name, and many other far worse motives did actually let loose their utmost rage against our Lord whenever he intimated his heavenly nature, and led them to direct attempts against his life. The necessity therefore that appears of not so frequently and explicitly insisting at first on this truth, both because they could not receive it while he was on earth, and because he would have been deprived of the means of converting the world by his instruction, is, I hope, in the last place, a sufficient answer to the objection, affording a reason why the tenet should
be

be more fully and expressly afterward insisted on by St. Paul and St. John.

The existence of what we term the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity being thus declared in the Gospel, it requires little proof to establish that of the Third. When there are once admitted more than one Person in the Deity, it does not appear that even perverseness itself can object much against the admission of another on any proper evidence. I shall only therefore briefly refer to those passages of Holy Writ, where the plain construction of the words supposes an Agent, and then represents that Agent to be similar and equal to our Lord; which is all the proof that needs to be afforded. The Holy Spirit is first then introduced in the New Testament as the cause of our Lord's birth. He next appears in the bodily shape of a Dove, and at the day of Pentecost in the form of cloven Tongues of Fire, as our Lord appeared in the shape of Man. He was also the Successor of Christ, sent, as he was, into the world to compleat the instruction and consolation of Believers, which was then begun; * “was, as † Christ, “not to speak of himself;” but “what he heard “that should he speak :” is brought in saying

* Joh. xiv. 16.

† Joh. v. 19, &c. viii. 26, comp. with xvi. 7, 13. *εκενος*, &c.

unto the Apostles at Jerusalem, "separate unto me Barnabas and Paul for the work whereunto I have called them*:" was "to dispense his gifts unto every man severally as he would†:" and, to produce no more instances, is expressly in two places associated on an equal footing with the Father and the Son; one in the last mentioned chapter by St. Paul, who thus speaks of the Three Persons, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all‡;" and the other in the solemn form prescribed for Baptism, which is ordered to be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost§."

If we discard from us the objection that might seem to arise from the want of a more express revelation of the Third Person at the very exordium of the Gospel, as we have done that occasioned by the progressive revelation of the Second, and for the same reason, I am not aware of any farther plausible ground of opposition. It is but a similar argument also to one before considered, to say that the Holy Spirit is spoken of frequently in Scripture as an Influence or

* Acts xiii. 2.

† 1 Cor. xii. 4.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

§ Matt. xxviii. 19.

Energy rather than as an Agent. The eternal Son of God is therein not only spoken of sometimes simply as Man; but is also called the "word" or reason, is described as the "brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his Person." Therefore, though the cases are only similar and by no means parallel, that the eternal Spirit should be denominated sometimes by his operations, his miraculous or ordinary influences on the mind, was only one among other instances of an accommodation to the perception of men. For they could far more readily apprehend the idea of an Efficacy or Energy, that was the object of their experience, and through which this Divine Agent continually imparted his presence to them, than refer themselves to the abstract notion of an invisible Divine Being: especially, if it be farther remembered that such had, therefore, been also the language of the Old Testament, to which they had been habituated. Where then no form that could be used was strictly proper, it cannot seem strange that, for the same reason which occasioned the use of any at all that might be intelligible, sometimes or often one more familiar should be suffered, while by the others that were left, all misapprehension about the nature of the Holy Spirit was guarded against.

But I should not omit to remark that such
G phrases

phrases are adapted to our situation even at this time. And it is therefore probable that the gracious providence of God, in appointing the language that should be used during the promulgation of the Gospel, had a farther respect unto the natural weakness of mankind. For, to dwell a little longer on this subject, there appears to be a perpetual reason for veiling the mysteries of Heaven under terms and conceptions that are familiar to men; nay, as they were designed for all, to the lowest and most uncultivated rank of them. Thus, as the Son of God came down from Heaven, and communicated his instruction by means of a real human form; and as the Holy Spirit also at times assumed different bodily shapes; the mysterious truths concerning the Divine Nature are likewise represented, though remotely, through figures taken from this world. Without this gracious approach toward us, the human mind, not only limited in its powers, but also entangled farther by its habitual commerce with sensible objects, could never entertain any fixed or applicable idea of the objects of its Faith and Worship. And, as it is most important to remark, it was in all likelihood on this account that the Second Person of the Trinity is called in Scripture the "Son of the Father," "the only begotten Son of God." This appellation is not used in order to convey any adequate conception of this mystery, and is still less accurate

curate as to the relation in which the Second Person stood to the First "before the world " was ;" but, the affinity of a father and son being the nearest in resemblance of any among men, in order only to shew that the relation between them is of an essential nature. For however improper, in strictness of language, this representation be, and thence unfit to furnish any consequences or deductions, except such as that which is now mentioned, other instances of which kind may be found in the Scripture, yet it is abundantly sufficient to effect the purpose for which all revelation is designed, the moral edification of the world. Thus also the case stands in respect to the Third Person, who is called the " Spirit," i. e. the Mind, from some resemblance to the Spirit or Mind of man. Or rather, since He is said to " proceed " and " to be sent," and by his energies to effect the great purposes of Wisdom and Goodness in this world, He is, in distinction, represented by that subtile and active element of nature, from which, on account of an imperfect resemblance, the appellation has been in common use transferred to denote the immaterial mind.* This is, I suppose, obvious to every one who has considered the subject, and attended to either Scripture. Thus, to say nothing of the Old Testament, He was first

* רוּחַ, πνεῦμα, spiritus,

symbolized at his appearance on the day of Pentecost; and to this similitude our Saviour alludes where he tells Nicodemus, "the Wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Under this image, I say, the Divine Spirit on account of his Operative Character has been generally represented, according to the primitive import of the word "Spirit" or "Breath;" by this constant appellation, and such use of the metaphor being farther distinguished to us from the First Person, who is also in one place declared by our Lord to be a Spirit, or an infinitely perfect Mind.* On the same account likewise he is sometimes, but not frequently, shadowed out under the other active elements of nature; as, of Fire, by the great Baptist, when he promised to Christians a Baptism of the Holy Ghost "and of Fire;" and of Water in this passage of Isaiah, "For I will pour Water upon him that is thirsty, and clouds upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing upon thy offspring."†

The view that has now been taken of these great Articles of our Faith leads particularly to

* Joh. iv. 24.

† Is. xlv. 3; See also Joh. vii. 38, 39.

two observations. While it is true that there is no proper or adequate knowledge in mysterious matters attainable by man, and though we thus at present see through the dark glass of an infinitely imperfect resemblance, yet we are not to forget that a certain and solid information is imparted to us. When the Almighty thus brings down the glorious things of his Kingdom to the level of human words and human ideas, we are, I presume, directed hereby to suppose the similitude, though infinitely disproportioned in kind and in degree, yet true and real in respect to ourselves, or so far as to be available unto some inferences that are necessarily implied in them. Thus, to demonstrate this by a few instances in addition to those before adduced, when God himself is said to be our Father, we are authorised to conclude, as it is expressed by the Psalmist, "that as a Father pitieth his own Children, so
"is the Lord merciful to them that fear him." When it is said in the Old Testament that "the
"Eyes of the Lord are over the righteous," that "they run to and fro through the earth," that "his Arm brings salvation," and such like phrases, we are to conclude that Power and Knowledge, with all their effects, but infinitely greater than those which are attained by man through these members of his body, are to be attributed to him.

And,

And, secondly, we are led unto the consideration of the final Purposes for which this partial information is vouchsafed: and this has been said to be the Moral Edification of mankind. For thus St. Paul teaches us, that "all Scripture
 " is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable
 " for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for
 " instruction in righteousness, that the man of
 " God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto
 " all good works."* An attention to this design of the Almighty, as it calls forth all our gratitude, assists also to repress a vain, irregular curiosity, and to correct our expectations and judgment in fixing the sense of the Holy Writings. For, whether we can always see it or not in every instance, this is the gracious end of every part of Divine Revelation: and this, in limiting the communication meant to be afforded, must therefore give a suitable shape and boundary unto our attempts to ascertain what it is: namely, such a boundary as is now contended for. I shall dismiss this subject with the celebrated words of the Jewish Lawgiver according to the common version. "The secret things belong
 " to the Lord our God: but those things which
 " are revealed belong unto us and our children
 " for ever, that we may do all the words of his
 " Law."†

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

† Deut. xxix. 29.

This discussion of the great topic of Scriptural Mysteries will, it is to be hoped, from the reflections it will suggest on the limited nature of our faculties, and on the method of revealing such things observable in the Scriptures, suffice to shew that none of these Articles of Faith are proper subjects for "the wisdom of men;" that we should reject all philosophical investigation of them, and reasoning about them; and that they must of necessity mislead, and also, in consequence, greatly injure all who are guilty of such presumption. And I shall say no more on this head than to remind you, that among the Articles which have been thus greatly erred in, are the Manner of the Co-existence of the Three Persons in one Godhead, the Manner of the Incarnation of our Divine Redeemer, and of the Operation of the Holy Ghost; the State of Glory to be revealed hereafter, and other questions of this kind.

One Article more seems however, on account of the cavil raised against it, to require some consideration. A Re-existence of the same Body at the general Resurrection has been denied to be possible, according to the natural constitution of things: and this impossibility, which is held to be unanswerable, is stated, as well as I can remember, in the following manner. It is said
that

that every particle of matter is in perpetual flux and change, and is constantly becoming part of different successive bodies. Consequently what has at one time constituted a portion of one human body, has in the course of ages since its dissolution constituted equally a portion at various times of other bodies in succession. Hence, therefore, at the resurrection, no one particle of matter can be appropriated to any single body; and it will be absolutely impossible to raise up the bodies of men identically the same.

In answer to this argument it might be sufficient to ask, if the Providence of God were indeed concerned to effect that which is thus thought impossible, who can dare to tell what it could not do? It might, for instance, be observed, that amid all that dispersion of the particles of each dead body, and the seeming incorporation by the course of vegetation or otherwise with different matter, it might, unseen by the blind sagacity of the Philosopher, preserve them particularly from entering into the composition of another human body, or, at least, from being contained within it at the moment of dissolution, disposing of them by an infinite variety of secondary causes as infinite Wisdom and Power might think fit. This would, I suppose, be a plain and adequate refutation of such an objection, which indeed is formed on a presumption

presumption of impossibility not in itself demonstrated, or deducible from observation and experience. But, unless I mistake, the declarations of Scripture on this Article have nothing to do with the argument. And we have again an opportunity presented to us of observing the faulty proceeding in these cavils before noticed: I mean, the unwarrantable assumption of an idea which Revelation never was intended to afford. That we shall rise again with our bodies it asserts: that they will be so far the same that we shall have a consciousness of their former being, and even that they shall be recognised by others, we may have cause to believe from argument and scripture. But I know of no text or good reason that requires the accomplishment of any Identity beyond this. The fact is, that the question of Identity in this instance hath been grossly mistated. When we speak of being the same identical persons that we were from the first commencement of our being, we manifestly do not mean a Sameness, which exists no where in nature, nor unless in the mind and imagination of men, and therefore has no place in any discussion of a matter of fact. For, to treat this subject shortly, who can think that his body or any other substance, animal or vegetable, consists at any distance of time of all the same precise particles that composed it heretofore, when the whole frame is in a perpetual course of decay
and

and renovation? Or who conceives that such preciseness is at all necessary to his idea of personal Identity? If therefore, which is surely the only just way of proceeding, we transfer the idea that we always entertain in every other instance of this subject, such as, for example, constitutes the Identity of a man from infancy to age and the grave, and apply it beyond that limit to the Resurrection, who will have room for a suspicion that he shall not be the same person; i. e. in the sense which is the usual one of such an expression? If he considers the Wisdom and Power of his Creator, who would think of doubting the effect of these, when they act in a manner that he can neither observe nor conceive? Or, if he still suffers his mind to dwell on the particulars of this Identity, who can tell what number or kind of particles in his frame are necessary to be preserved, or can at all determine the line by which Identity and Diversity are separated? For this, surely, is a secret hid far from his view and apprehension. On both these accounts, on which it is, I hope, unnecessary to enlarge, man is excluded from a pretence to doubt on the practicability of this matter, and on this, as on the other mysteries of Christian Faith, he must resolve the credibility of it into the assurance vouchsafed by God that it will take place, and his apprehension of it into the limited information which God has imparted,

If

If we therefore consult this, we shall find, in the celebrated passage of this epistle of St. Paul, what is perfectly agreeable to this just idea of Identity but inconsistent with the other, an intimation of a Change. In analogy to the change from infancy to perfect manhood is to be the change from an earthly body to a heavenly, from corruptible to immortal. He there informs us that flesh and blood cannot inherit the mansions of Glory, and that therefore, by a mysterious alteration, they shall be spiritualized at the moment of Resurrection, after the fashion of that glorious Body with which our Lord ascended into the Heavens. And as we may suppose that he underwent this change on his Ascension, so that his earthly Body was not destroyed or left behind, so our future glorified bodies shall take their rise from our present ones; shall, as the Apostle answers the foolish objector of his day, spring from the poor remains that will be deposited in the earth, and be in a similar manner related to these corruptible elements of their being, as the wheat or other grain, in its full vigour and beauty at the season of harvest, is to the small and contemptible seed that had been sown in the ground.

I beg leave to conclude with again insisting on the distinction that has been noticed between the
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the mysteries of Faith and subjects of Human Speculation. The former are only known to us inasmuch as they are revealed by the Spirit of God. Beyond the mere letter of his communications on any of these subjects, separately weighed, and carefully compared with other texts that are connected with it; and the necessary consequences plainly deduced, we cannot at all hope to succeed in any enquiry into them during this life. Human Ideas, and much more, human Words, are derived from Things of this World, and are the result only of human Experience and Reflection. These lead us no farther, even in those matters which are the daily objects of our senses, than to a very limited and imperfect apprehension of them; such indeed only as is instrumental to the needs, conveniencies, and pleasures of this life. Is it not plain therefore that such language and reasonings as are inadequate to a perfect knowledge of these things, must be more, far more inadequate to the mysteries of Heaven? And as these mysteries are necessarily revealed to us by such means, it is evident that an imperfect communication must be all that was designed; forasmuch as they can convey to us only that knowledge of heavenly things, which is founded on the similitude between them and earthly things, a similitude infinitely disproportioned both in kind and degree. Thus these
mysteries

mysteries also, as it hath been observed of the mysteries of the natural world, are understood no farther than the good of man requires; than his edification in righteousness demands; and can not in the nature of things become the subject of human reasoning and investigation.

As therefore it has been shewn, on a former occasion, that Faith is generally necessary to Knowledge, so is it more especially to the Knowledge, as far as it is now attainable, of the glorious truths, by the revelation of which, life and immortality are brought to light.

May we adopt that Humility and Caution in the consideration of its subjects, which have been enjoined by the authority of the great Apostle! May they keep from us that confusion and those errors, in which a presumptuous depraved philosophy has ever plunged all who transgress them, and determine us to "cease from the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge!"* For they will then not fail to secure to us those infinitely valuable ends, which the Gospel was designed to produce in its professors, Truth of Opinion, and Happiness of Mind; since leading us unto a sound Faith with the

* Prov. xix. 27.

Knowledge of our Duty to God and Man, they will direct and enable us to keep it, "in the
" Unity of Spirit, in the Bond of Peace, and
" Righteousness of Life."

S E R M O N V.

H E B. XI. 6.

*Without Faith it is impossible to please
God.*

HAVING considered the question of the objects of our Faith, regarded abstractedly as speculative truths, I should proceed to treat of the accession of credibility derived from the Effects which they tend to and are able to produce. But on this question the text I have now read is sufficient, and excuses the labour; especially when the context also is taken into view. The whole chapter indeed is that eulogy on Faith which we ought to have framed. But this especial instance of the assumption of Enoch unto eternal life, and the reasoning used thereon are peculiarly available to our design. The whole passage is in these words: “ By Faith
“ Enoch was translated that he should not see
“ death;

“ death; and was not found, because God had
 “ translated him. For before his translation he
 “ had this testimony that he pleased God. But
 “ without Faith it is impossible to please Him:
 “ for he that cometh to God must believe that
 “ He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that
 “ diligently seek Him:” or, as the argument
 may be shortly expressed, It is impossible to
 please God without believing that He is, and
 that He is a rewarder of them that diligently
 seek Him.

On so plain an assertion it is needless to ex-
 patiate: and I shall only say that if, as is most
 true, to please Almighty God be as it were the
 only object to man, and there be only one way
 to do so, the question of the Utility of our Faith
 is at once determined. For if in these early
 times before the Law, the imperfect system of
 Faith imparted could hold out a sufficient in-
 formation to men, surely the Gospel, the per-
 fection and crown of all preceding dispensations,
 most abundantly declares to us that “ God is,
 “ and is indeed a rewarder,” even to eternal life,
 “ of such as diligently seek him.” Thus there-
 fore the credibility of the articles of our Faith
 is gloriously confirmed by their effects, the ac-
 ceptable obedience they enable men to perform,
 and the heavenly prize they have ensured to
 that obedience. As Enoch obtained this blessed-
 ness,

ness, there is left no room to doubt that under the covenant which promises that glorious reward to all who embrace it, many millions of the human race have been crowned with it, having walked in that perfect way which our Divine Redeemer, his Apostles and Martyrs have laid open to us both by their instruction, and by their example.

Leaving therefore this topic to be the employment of our gratitude; I ought here to take farther notice of the Acceptations that Faith bears, as a Practical Principle; but I refer this to an occasion that I shall presently have of considering them. I proceed, therefore, according to the plan of my last discourse, to offer some remarks on a few among those objections which are usually, and most idly, raised against the Moral system of the Gospel. How idly these have been raised, appears indeed, immediately and fully, from the kind of reasoning before laid down on the question of the Articles of Belief, which is to be in the same manner applied to this subject. For if it be proved that a system of piety and virtue was certainly communicated from God, there is at once an end of all murmur or dispute concerning the wisdom or goodness of the whole or of any part. It must be an unexceptionable moral dispensation. It must be impossible that there should be any part absolutely

incompatible with the Divine Attributes, confessedly inconsistent with another, or impracticable in itself; and such an instance we affirm that no man has found.

It follows, that our only concern is to ascertain the true meaning of every part, at least of every one that affects the direction of our conduct. In our attempt to do this, we must also, conformably to the general rule, restrict ourselves throughout to plain and necessary deductions from the texts of Scripture, or from a comparison of one text with another. For even in the moral precepts, the wisdom of the world and of the worldly philosopher ever had, in some respect or other, and therefore, we may conclude, ever will fall short. The world that by wisdom never rightly knew God, by the same cause of error never knew his will. I shall not enter farther into this topic than to prove what I assert by the testimony of experience; and, for this, refer to the Apostle at the beginning of his epistle to the Romans. And if such was the case of those who had every advantage of the deepest learning and greatest genius, there is no good reason to argue that it could ever be expected from human ability. If it be answered that, with the assistance of the Gospel, the moral science may be completely elucidated by the learning and skill of men, and that no part or question is now out
of

of their reach, I have only to appeal still to experience; to the questions that have always been disputed, and to the differences of opinion that have still subsisted among them.* The Nature and Principles of obedience, nay almost every moral Duty, have been by the worldly reasoners of the age made the subject of controversy; in some cases which are comprehended, of doubt, injurious perversion, or limitation. Almost every vice under certain circumstances has been excused or rather justified. But if this were otherwise, as the Scriptures were designed to instruct all men unto perfect obedience, among whom so many are incapable of subtile argument, it is plain that there must be some other way of knowing right from wrong, than by refined investigation and elaborate distinctions, a way plain and intelligible to all.

This therefore we affirm is to be sought out of the Gospel, in that manner only which has been prescribed. And if, through these means,

* I might instance here particularly the Jesuitical tenets of Mental Reservation, Probable Reasons of conduct, and Philosophical sin: also, not to mention the grosser errors of such as defend the vices of their own temper and habits, those who bring the precepts of Revelation to the level of their natural sense and perception, and where these disagree, adopt the latter. Among these are the advocates for suicide, and, it must be added, for duelling, a practice, which in truth would be a disgrace to a barbarous nation, but is an object of horror in a country that receives the Gospel of Christ.

the lowest disciple of Christ is fully informed of all in which he is concerned, by that doctrine which was "preached to the poor," with what pretence of wisdom and reason can the learned among men pretend to decline being instructed by a safe and certain, though common, instruction from the Divine Source of Truth? Can any decent objection be made against the participation of the simplest blessing from such a quarter, because it is equally within the reach of all the sons of men? It would be the same folly, and attended by similar effects, with the madness of such as should refuse the universal blessing of light, or the other common benefits of nature. For, if the only way to conjecture with any probability of success concerning the divine purposes, be through the analogy of his proceedings, it should seem most likely that He, who has made those advantages which are necessary for our bodies equally or similarly perceptible by all, has likewise made the rule which is to guide all men unto justification and eternal life, discernible by one common apprehension, as it is in the practice consonant to our general nature and constitution. He alone knows what is best adapted to both, and what will without any danger of misguidance, as it were almost necessarily, lead us unto truth.

But the propriety of this mode in searching
after

after religious truth, is more particularly evinced in the case of those topics that respect the agency of the Almighty in the Oeconomy of the Gospel: In considering these, we must, very evidently, confine ourselves to the caution which has been enjoined by the Apostle. In order to be here in the least wise, we must become "foolish," that is, void of all knowledge or opinion of our own, and like children to receive implicitly the precise lessons which our Divine Master thinks fit to impart.

It has, I am confident, been chiefly owing to an offence against this rule of procedure, that mistakes have been made and objections urged on such points. It may conduce perhaps not only to the refutation of some among the most material of them, but to invalidate in general that suspicion and uneasiness which too often arise upon such subjects, if this fault be exposed in a few instances. A few words will, it should seem, be sufficient on each. For, according to what has been said, the main requisite in sacred matters is caution lest we go beyond our authority: and it is obvious that the instruction which is equally designed for the ignorant and the learned, must be comprisable in a small compass.

Some of the principal topics that have been

controverted are, Predestination and Election, Grace and Free-Will, Merit of works and Justification. Of these I shall speak in their order.

The first of these rests chiefly on two passages in St. Paul's writings.* As the words in both are express and clear, whatever they assert is not to be set aside, however afterwards we may determine concerning the inferences to which they are available. Taking them therefore as they stand, let us allow that God did according to his own good pleasure select some out of the bulk of mankind, who consequently were admitted to his favour, and in the next life were to be exalted unto glory. They were "fore-known, predestined, called, justified, and glorified," successively, "according to God's purpose." This is the simple statement of the matter.† And this has given alarm and horror to some who think that no regard is therefore

* Eph. i. 4, 5, 11, &c. Rom. viii. 28, &c. See also 1 Pet. which after the perusal of the above epistles, especially the last, to which it is singularly parallel, does not seem to require a separate consideration; 2 Thess. ii. 9, &c. and other passages which need not be discussed.

† It may be proper to add that this election appears to bear a respect unto the *sincere* Christian, as distinguished from those who as to the *means* of grace were called as well as himself. For the Gospel was preached to multitudes who did not accept it, though offered to them. So Matt. xxii. 14. Jude 4, &c. By this last passage, and particularly by the example of Judas, Joh. vi. 70. xiii. 11, 18, as also by the various texts in the epistles relating to apostate,

paid unto the sincere endeavour of men to procure the Divine mercy; and have deduced a doctrine from it equally terrible and impious; that all except this certain number are, notwithstanding such sincere endeavour, doomed by an arbitrary decree to endless torment. But the answer, I think, is plain and direct. At the same time that the Almighty is affirmed to have called whom he pleased to happiness, and doomed whom he pleased to misery, and to have acted, as it is frequently and usually said in Scripture, for his own glory, it is first to be considered that this is the whole of what is asserted on the subject. Nor is there, I believe, a single text which intimates any thing concerning the motives of his choice; or whether these do or do not respect the different merits, I mean comparative merits or demerits, of his creatures. There is therefore, so far as this leads, no direct and necessary inconsistency revealed between these principles of his proceedings, and the wish declared in another place that "none should perish," "but all should come to repentance;" or the constant tenor of the invitations to the covenant of mercy, and the promises made under it. It might indeed have been expected, that no man

apostate, wicked Christians, it appears, as it may by the way be remarked, that even the professors of the Gospel were not, in the Scripture language now treated of, always among the *elect* children of God.

could have thought one part of the Gospel inconsistent with another. At least it surely seems strange that, because the Almighty has declared that He acts as He wills, He therefore could not be believed to will nothing, however freely and independently, but what was in the most perfect degree just and benevolent to every one of his creatures. For certainly the only conclusion which we could possibly draw from his attributes, and the history of the redemption, must be that his purpose would be all that was good and gracious. Consistent with this representation is the truly wise advice given by our Church in her 17th article of subscription, wherein, having these doctrines on one hand, and the general promises, threatnings, and exhortations of the Gospel on the other, she directs both to be received.

And so far is the Scripture from sanctioning any other notion than the above, that if in the next place we look more attentively to these passages in question, we shall find so irrational and dreadful a suspicion no way related to their scope and meaning. The first of these is in the epistle to the Romans, which was written chiefly to prove that the Gentile Christians were entitled to the privileges of the Gospel as well as the Jewish: and the Apostle begins the eighth chapter with assuring them that “there was now no
“ con-

“ condemnation to them which were in Christ
“ Jesus, and walked not after the flesh, but after
“ the spirit.” He pursues this consolatory argument throughout the chapter ; the whole drift and purpose of which indeed is only to cheer and support them under the sufferings with which they were then afflicted, by the assurance of their relation to God, and their future reward in his presence. It is in prosecution of such an argument that he tells them in the 28th verse, “ And
“ we know that all things work together for
“ good to them that love God, to them who
“ are called :” after which come the words on which the doctrine of election and the like is built : and these words are concluded by the following inference, “ What shall we then say to
“ these things ? If God be for us, who can be
“ against us ? He that spared not his own Son,
“ but delivered him up for us all, how shall he
“ not with him also freely give us all things ?
“ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s
“ elect ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he
“ that condemneth ? It is Christ that died.”
From this view it plainly appears that the design of them, far from any purpose of shewing that other men would be eternally lost, much less that men would suffer by a decree independent of their deserts, was solely to persuade them that they themselves were sure of their salvation, as long as they believed in Christ, and “ through
“ the

“ the spirit mortified the deeds of the body.” It was in fact to assure them of the falsehood of all which the Jews might denounce against them ; namely, that their own nation was alone the peculiar people of God, selected from the world, to whom the blessings of Heaven belonged : that these were boasts which needed not to intimidate them ; that the Gospel of Christ had superseded the covenant of Moses, as well as the profane systems of paganism ; that they now on having embraced that Gospel were the true, the called and chosen people of God, as certainly as the Jews had ever been, were “ the Sons of God.” And it is here to be observed that these terms of Election and the like are adopted particularly on account of the Jews, being derived from the Scriptural phrases of the Old Covenant, and the manner of speaking on this subject then in use. If then this be the case, needs it to be shewn at large that such a strain addressed to such people under such circumstances, and therefore necessarily couched in the strongest terms, is by no means capable of furnishing such a deduction as that which has been supposed ? It is surely against all criticism to distort words from any particular use to which they were solely designed, unto a general doctrine, especially one that contradicts the known tenor or other express declarations of Scripture. But to proceed :

If

If it be thought by any that the next chapter of the same epistle decides the question against this representation, wherein the Apostle goes on to consider the distinction made by the Almighty between those who were chosen and those who were rejected from his covenants, it is still easy to reply. We must, as before, be cautious that we do not assume more than what necessarily arises out of the words and arguments before us. And first, as to temporal blessings, or spiritual advantages, *comparatively* regarded, in which the differences made between some individuals or nations, and others, are observable in every kind and degree, these are out of all question or consideration. They are not only a free gift of the Lord of all things ; but the various and innumerable benefits which may be derived, not only on the persons thus passed over or exalted, but on the rest of the world, by such an inequality of dispensation, immediately or by degrees, are far beyond our perception. Such matters are obviously within the exclusive province of Him, whose grand scheme of providence we are not at all capable of comprehending in our imperfect and limited view. In the mean while we are to remember that his “mercy is over all his works ;” * and that to no part of mankind hath He left Himself without witness. † And

* Pf. cxlv. 9—xxxiii. 5.

† Acts xvii. 24, &c. So xiv. 15—17, and Rom. i. 19, 20.

in the next life, as we have reason to hope from the whole tenor of Scripture, he will compleat each man's happiness in an exact and merciful regard unto his sincerity and care to please him, however circumstanced as to the means of grace every individual may be. Our Saviour has thus informed us, that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him" only "shall much be required."*

And secondly, we leave it to the consideration of such objectors, in regard to the *positive* evils said to be inflicted on particular men, or their rejection from the divine favour, that, in the instance here produced of Pharaoh, St. Paul has himself removed the whole ground of all their objections. The text which they alledge is in ver. 18. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." In answer to those who did or might urge this as not only an arbitrary but an unjust procedure, especially if extended to the dispensation of the Gospel, he asks, "What if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?"† So that by the Apostles' own ex-

* Luke xii. 48. fo Rom. ii. 11, &c.

† Consistently with this, God taught the Jews by Ezekiel, when they reasoned with similar impropriety (c. 18.) on the denunciation of the second commandment, that whatever might be the difference or disadvantage incurred by the descendants of a wicked man, they should not be positively punished but for their own

position of that positive expression, the Supreme Being no otherwise hardeneth the heart of a sinner, than by leaving him to pursue his own wilful course for a longer time without cutting him off. If then this mode of interpreting be applied to the positive declarations, wherever they occur, on the subject of the Evangelical œconomy,* we may reason that those men, or classes of men, who are said in the most express terms to be excluded from the Gospel, and eternal life, are such as by their own perverseness had become incapable of them. That such people should be left to themselves, and “given over to a reprobate mind,”† or, in the language of the eleventh chapter, should “have their eyes darkened that they should not see,” should become “vessels of wrath” and “dishonor,” would be consistent with the plainest and fullest notions of justice. For they are thus become proper objects of his anger, and fit to be held out to the view of the world by their misery and calamities, as instances of his judgment on their impenitence. But that they should also then be made the instruments of Divine mercy to effect the salvation of the Gentile World; and this in order farther that their own conversion might be gradually accomplished

own iniquity. ver. 18, 19. It is almost unnecessary to add that the writings of this prophet are particularly applicable to the whole of the present topic.

* As in ver. 23, &c.

† Rom. i. 28. so ver. 24, 26.

thereby,

thereby, and thus all mankind be finally brought unto a saving knowledge of the Gospel, is indeed, as the Apostle calls it, a Mystery, in which we may well admire at the “depth of the riches “and wisdom and knowledge of God;” and with most humble and thankful hearts ascribe glory for ever to Him.*

It remains, after what has been said, only to intimate, as far as we can learn, the reason why this absolute language is so frequently used in Scripture; which will confirm the interpretation hitherto given of its doctrine. It appears from the History of the New Testament, and, as we have seen, from St. Paul’s writings, that the Jews resisted and were enraged at any suggestion of their not being exclusively the covenanted people of God. This corrupt and proud nation thought that He was bound to them as the children of Abraham, and that by their observance of the Law they were perfectly righteous before Him, and had a claim on the score of absolute justice to whatever blessings He could bestow; and that thus the kingdom of the Messiah was their own right, which they could challenge as due to their merits from his hands. Under these circumstances, it seems to have been necessary on the other hand that the preachers of this new covenant with mankind should,

* Rom. xi. 33, 36,

on every occasion, insist on a directly contrary doctrine ; should with a particular view to this error, which was a grand stumbling block and obstacle against the reception of Christianity, deny all merit of works, i. e. such merit from obedience to the law as they pretended to ; and to pronounce that every blessing by which some men were distinguished above others, and accordingly the revelation of the Gospel, was the effect of the Divine mercy alone, a free gift to mankind. Men being in a state of transgression since the fall, and especially under the law of which this nation boasted, had no claim to any good, were indeed on the contrary, strictly speaking, as enemies of God, and objects of wrath.* It is hence therefore that these positions, thus strongly and absolutely worded, are so constantly brought forward and dwelt upon, throughout the sacred writings. God's glory, and Pleasure or Will, are expressly represented to be the sole object of all his proceedings ; the immediate interposition of his power the mean of all that is done in this world ; and men, as mere instruments in his hands, or as " clay in the hands of " the potter," to effect and to become whatever he may please. To those who must have known the purpose which these phrases were meant to serve, they were as free from all danger of misapplication as they were necessary to their end.

* Rom. v. 8, 9, 10.

The misfortune is, that since that time ignorant or rash men have taken them out of the occasion to which they were adopted and applied ; and, as observed before, by a violent abuse have interpreted them of a general doctrine which they never were intended to convey.*

The sum of all that may be deduced from Scripture is this. The Almighty in conducting the plan by which mankind is to be saved, chose some men from the rest, in order at the same time to their own peculiar happiness, and to establish his dispensations in the world. But He chose these, from his foreknowledge that they would be fit objects of his favour, and, consequently willing to effect his purpose. Hence the children of Abraham were first elected to a covenant with God ; † with a farther respect unto a perfect Religion which was to be revealed when the Divine wisdom saw that “ the fulness of time ” would be come. At this fit time, the new covenant was offered to the Jews, among whom a remnant of sincere men was still left. ‡ From this number, a few, the best fitted for the purpose by their dispositions, circumstances, or

* I do not here enter into the consideration, how far the Scriptures use this language in opposition likewise to the arrogance and boldness of all men in general, and at all places and times, or in deference to the Supreme Dignity of the Divine Author of all things, which is a different topic, though well worthy of our regard.

† See Gen. xviii. 17—19.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 13. Matt. xiii. 11, 12.

knowledge, were miraculously assisted, to call, in the first instance, those of their own brethren who were able to receive it : after which, the rest being for the present left to their own impenitence, the teachers of the Gospel were sent to call those among the Heathen nations, wherever the Spirit of God directed, who were of a disposition to embrace it.* Such men were by the means of salvation led on gradually unto holiness, and became children of God, and co-heirs with Christ of his glorious kingdom through his merits. To this they were elected by the foreknowledge of God, who from the beginning had in his view this disposition of their hearts, his own purpose of offering them the means of grace then to be imparted, and the consequences of both, according to natural necessity, namely, their sanctification, and the covenanted reward of it. And pursuant to the same system of accomplishing the salvation of the world, chiefly by the use of natural means, is the purpose, yet unfinished, of converting the Jewish people through the example of Gentile Christians.† In this view therefore, true Christians may be justly said to be predestined ; and the language of Scripture on the subject, if we consider at the same time the persons and doctrines against which it was fashioned, is intelligible, seen to be per-

* Acts xviii. 10.—viii. 26, &c. compare 2 Tim. ii. 21, with Rom. ix. 22, 23.

† Rom. x. 19, comp. with xi. 11, 14.

fectly agreeable to the fullest declarations, in other passages, of the Divine mercy and goodness to all his creatures, and to that general representation of the Almighty, so necessary to the true piety of man, whereby He becomes the supreme object of Love and filial veneration.

Nor will it appear from the other passage in the epistle to the Ephesians, that they were predestined or elected in any other sense, than, as it hath been shewn, all true Christians were: that is, they were, like the Jews of old, invited unto a covenant because it was foreknown they would accept and fulfil the conditions of it. In this context it is to be observed, that they who were predestined were such as, after that they had heard the word of truth, trusted in Christ: and that it was not till after that they had believed, that they were sealed with the Spirit of promise. But enough has been said on this subject.

Under this article, as we may have observed, is included also the question respecting the Foreknowledge of God, which in the passage first cited, is said to precede his Predestination of man. It has with equal want of sober and cautious reasoning, been asserted, that this unavoidably implies his necessary determination of their conduct,

conduct, which therefore is, whether good or bad, incapable of blame or praise, and cannot justly receive either punishment or reward. On which it may be, after what has been said, sufficient to remark, that if this be not an unavoidable inference, beside its impossibility from the inconsistency which it would have with the general invitations, promises, and threats of the Gospel, we can only argue to such a conclusion from our own experience in similar cases. It is therefore, it should seem, a proper reply to ask, whether it is not possible for men of sagacity and skill in human affairs to foretell often the conduct of others whom they thoroughly know, under some known circumstances, without being supposed to have any unseen influence in directing their choice and conduct; and then, to ask farther, whether they will not attribute the most perfect knowledge, with the proportionate consequence of it, to the Supreme Intelligence of God? This therefore is at least an argument in bar against such objections.

The doctrine of Free Will is another topic wherein a misguided ingenuity has raised unnecessary and ill founded difficulties. The first is that of those who say that man has no free will, because in every thing that he does, he is determined, either by his reason, whether it be right

or not, or by his passions. To this it might be answered that every man's common experience contradicts the assertion; as there are many cases, wherein the motives to act one way or the other, or to remain without acting at all, are so balanced, that he is perfectly indifferent, and at last often chooses merely for the sake of determining. To raise up subtle, and much more, empty argument, against such an obvious and general fact, is not consistent with sound reason. Nay farther, in those cases wherein an appearance of greater reason on one side than on the other influences our choice so absolutely, that we cannot while we deliberate, approve the thought of acting in opposition to it, we have, according even to this idea of liberty, a perfect freedom. For we must be conscious that we even then have the power by a momentary perverseness and mere self will, to turn aside our thoughts and attention, or to raise such an opposition by the subservient agency of our sensual passions and appetites as to overthrow all its influence.

But the truth is that we have mistaken the notion of Free will, and are, as on the subject of Identity, disputing in this likewise about a creature of our own imagination. We have not been content to take it from a view of our nature and from experience, which ought to have directed us at least in the discussion of a practical question.

question. Now the only universal idea of Liberty is the power to will and do what we think fit, and of Necessity, to be deprived of that power. The plain consequence hence deducible is, that when we are so circumstanced that we cannot in every case do otherwise than as we see fit, such a condition is the most perfect and absolute freedom. For, as in the constitution of man there are conceived to be only two principles, the judgment and the will; when the latter is uniformly persuaded, and is in harmony with the former, there is plainly no room for any coercion, and therefore no slavery. Alas! this freedom was once, we are told, but soon ceased to be, the lot of man. Strictly speaking indeed, it exists only in that absolutely perfect Mind, whose unalterable privilege it is that it always does what it sees to be right.* What the condition of man became after the admission of sin, St. Paul informs us. "The law, says he, is spiritual: but " I am carnal, sold under sin. I delight in the " law of God after the inward man, but I see " another law in my members, warring against " the law of my mind, and bringing me into cap- " tivity to the law of sin which is in my mem- " bers." This melancholy state of servitude is also announced to us in the memorable words of our Saviour, " Whoso committeth sin is the servant " of sin:" and under this state he hath assured

* Job, iv. 18.

us that we can do nothing of ourselves ; that our freedom now depends on our reception of his Gospel ; “ for if the Son shall make us free, “ we shall be free indeed.” And of this liberty the Apostle farther tells us, “ that the law of the “ Spirit of life hath made us free from the law “ of sin and death :” a law that in the state both of Paganism and the Judaical Covenant enslaved the minds of men. “ For as they that are in the “ flesh cannot please God, Christians are not in “ the flesh but in the spirit.” Our freedom therefore consists in this, that by the motives to holiness which the Gospel lays before us, and by the assistance of the Divine spirit, our spirit is enabled to suppress that principle of sensuality foreign to our nature, which like a conqueror established a new dominion over it at the fall, and to restore our will to its original harmony with reason and conscience.

I beg here to subjoin one remark on this topic. Under the deplorable state of slavery, above described, we are likewise told by our Lord, as we might have concluded from a consideration of it, that we were not of ourselves ever able to embrace that state of life which should effect our emancipation, though it was proposed to us. And thus it must be for this plain reason, that we were not able to do any thing that was good.

We

We could not entertain so clear and compleat a perception of its excellence, nor consequently so strong and powerful desire of whatever was right, as to enter upon a proper plan with sufficient resolution. For thus we read, that when the Jews, to whom the Gospel had been preached, were through the pride, avarice, and sensuality by which they were enslaved, unable to receive it, saying,* “How is it that he came down from Heaven?” our Lord answered them, “Murmur not among yourselves: no man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him. It is written in the Prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me.” And hence is our Church justified in asserting this doctrine in her tenth Article of Religion.

This doctrine of the Spirit of God preventing as well as accompanying our own endeavours, leads to and explains that of Grace; a term which like that of Free Will has been used in a sense beyond its true import. It means Favour, and, subsequently, a Gift; and is used in Scripture frequently, by way of distinction, to signify the two greatest gifts of the Almighty, the Gospel-Covenant, and the assistance of his Spirit to accept

* Joh. vi. 42.

handled by a great writer of our Church, may, I presume, be thus also shortly explained.*

Faith, by the definition laid down, is belief in testimony, and hath also been shewn to be, secondarily, extended to several other acceptations thence derived, relating to the understanding, and the conduct of men. As we have exemplified the former of these derivations from passages of Scripture, we proceed to the instances of this latter sort. That Faith then means in the New Testament the effect of belief on the disposition of heart, and the practice consequent on this, has been indisputably shewn, from the epistle to the Hebrews, to which other places might be added. It also signifies a *firm reliance and confidence* in Him whose declarations we receive, as in St. Mark's Gospel, where Christ reproves the apostles for want of Faith, because they were fearful on account of the storm; which should be compared with the similar address to St. Peter in St. Matthew's, "O thou of little Faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" It denotes a *ground and reason of belief*, as in the 17th chapter of the Acts, where our common version has rendered it "assurance†." It imports the *personal veracity*, or, as we say, Good Faith of any one; as in the epistle to the

* Bp. Bull's Harmonia Apostolica.

† Ver. 31.

Romans, where the Apostle asks, " Shall their
 " unbelief make the Faith of God of none
 " effect?" that is, take away the fulfilment
 of his promise; to which it is replied, " God
 " forbid: yea let God be true and every man a
 " liar." It also means a *superior* and *extraordinary*
degree of belief, and such as was granted to the
 Christians at that time, as in the first epistle to
 the Corinthians, where it is remarked among
 the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. It is also
 used for an *attachment* to the author of the
 gospel, and the party of his followers, as in the
 epistle to Philemon. Lastly, it also sometimes
 occurs in the Scripture as a word of common
 import, without any reference to Religion.*
 From these instances appear the propriety and
 necessity of apprehending the connexion that
 exists between the primary and subsequent senses
 of the term, and of seeing that the scriptural
 employment of it is of the same nature and
 fashion as the use of it in the ordinary concerns
 of life. Hence we shall also be led to think that
 religious Faith does not, by being strengthened
 through the miraculous or ordinary influence of
 the Holy Spirit, suffer any change in it's nature
 or direction. It is, on the contrary, rational and
 probable to suppose, that the Holy Spirit only
 increases it's force by causing in the mind a

* 2 Tim. ii. 13. † 1 Tim. v. 12. 1 Tim. ii. 7. Gal. v. 22.

more clear apprehension of the arguments on which it is founded, and of the importance of the truths which it contains. He acts through the means, and according to the method, of our natural powers, and is indeed what He is termed, a help, an assistance in their operations, but is by no means a substitute for them. Such an apprehension of this matter will enable us to have that clear and easy idea of this term which it highly concerns us to entertain, securing us from any complicated, or mystical notions, that, by involving us in darkness, serve only to the purposes of Enthusiasm. What has been said will farther receive some illustration from the discussion of the question in which we are now engaged.

It is evident from the reason of things, and from the scriptures, that religious worship being a concern between God and ourselves, is properly seated in the heart or mind. The New Testament has solemnly revealed the great truth that God is a Spirit, from whence it also draws the conclusion that he is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. These are the essential points of religious service, in opposition to the external pomp of sacrifices. It follows, by parity of reasoning, that the disposition of the heart or spirit is through the whole of our conduct, as far as the question respects our Obedience, the
only

only important article in the sight of God. And this is to be asserted without any denial of the necessity of good Works. For as the prostration of the knees, and supplication of the voice, are a natural and necessary result of the devotion of the mind, are the due homage of the body, and are instrumental to excite devotion in others, and extend the glory of God among men, yet are not to be brought into comparison with the worship of the heart, so a mind rightly affected and disposed by belief in the Gospel, being the proper and immediate cause of virtue, is justly set above its effect; and as all actions proceed from the purpose or temper of the heart, becomes, as it were, exclusively the object of regard. If our minds are, in consequence of believing the truths which the Gospel reveals, humble, full of gratitude, indifferent to every thing but the care of pleasing our heavenly Father, in the hope of his gracious promises, the Christian character is fully formed. It cannot in truth be considered separately from good Actions, which virtually exist in it, and as necessarily belong to it as good fruit to a good tree. They stand together, and form but one part of the question, one single object for our apprehension or discussion. On the other hand, a belief that the Gospel is true may be unhappily unconnected with any permanent good influence on the heart and affections; it may stand at a wide

wide distance from it. The seed may die in the ground ; or its germination may soon be stopped, and it will die on the surface, spoiled of all its virtue.* The distinction therefore that we seem concerned to make, is between belief that is followed by a thorough conversion of the heart to Christian piety and goodness, and a belief that is not. The first of these is, I think, that of which the New Testament usually speaks, the subject of its arguments, sanctions, and exhortations.

The points to be deduced from this plain doctrine are, conformably to the purpose of the Apostles, are first with St. Paul, that nothing will avail unto justification but Faith or the belief of the Gospel, neither the best possible obedience under the Jewish Law, nor the most perfect virtue of the Heathen Philosopher. For, beside other considerations, all human virtue, under either of those weak and defective systems, is imperfect, more or less tainted with sin, in it's motives and performance ; and therefore is strictly to be regarded as sinful, as the 13th Article of our Church has justly observed. Whereas my text informs us, that the motives which the Gospel of Christ supplies, and the law it prescribes, lead, by the aid of the Holy

† Matth. xiii. 18, &c.

Spirit, to a pure and sincere state of obedience, wherein the application of the merits of Christ's death renders our service, though in one sense imperfect, acceptable in the sight of God.

Again, with St. James, those are excluded by the forementioned doctrine, who think that a simple assent to the truth of the Gospel, without those effects on the temper and affections of a believer which are immediately connected with the performance of the Divine law, entitles them to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. Such Faith is dead, available to no good end, like the Faith of the condemned Angels. When Abraham was justified, it was when Faith wrought with his Works to compass that end; and by his Works was his Faith evinced to be that operating principle in the disposition and affections of the mind which, as we have stated, alone makes belief thus acceptable in the sight of God. For his belief in the promise of God had so fully possessed his heart with reliance on him, and submission to his commands, that it was habitually disposed to obey in all things without dispute or question, even in such a perplexing and severe trial as that in which the Most High thought fit to exercise him.

As therefore, to conclude, the mistake on the subject of Predestination has arisen from in-
attention

attention to the circumstances under which the sacred writers introduced that doctrine; and on the subject of Grace, from a similar disregard of the necessity in those times of an extraordinary and miraculous dispensation of the Holy Spirit; so the scriptural doctrine of Faith has been misconceived by many who forget the particular occasion which then existed for the so continual and exalted mention of it. The Jewish and Heathen Religions then possessed the world: and since these were to be removed only by a new Faith, or belief in the communication of a new Religion, the consequence of which was to be holiness unto eternal life, this must necessarily become the great theme of the preachers' first encomiums, as to establish it in the world must be the aim of their first attempts. This in time, as St. James has pointed out, led some, and has since led many, to misconceive it, who no longer regarding it as the cause of Christian piety and virtue, attribute to it a mystical and imaginary nature and efficacy. But this delusion, I hope, has been sufficiently exposed by means of what has been hitherto advanced on this great topic.

If therefore, in this and the preceding discourse, those points which have been selected as appearing the most difficult and frequently misunderstood, have been at all, though shortly, yet,

yet, satisfactorily explained and vindicated, every one may, I think, be led to suppose that all the topics of Revelation may be cleared from the cavils of the Sceptic and misrepresentations of the Heretic. We do indeed most confidently assert that the more true learning under the guidance of sincerity and caution is able to discover from Sacred Scripture concerning the Articles proposed to our Faith, and the ways of Providence, the more matter will good men find of joy, and grateful submission to the Almighty. It is, however, equally important to remember, what has been observed, that however useful these investigations of learning may be to those who are placed within the reach of them, they are not generally or essentially necessary to a Christian's Faith and Virtue. When the Sacred Scriptures are once received as the word of God, the truths which are sufficient for both are plain and express; and are not to be disputed and questioned, but have a clear title to be received with simplicity and entire submission.

I have already trespassed on your time; but beg leave to add two short observations, with which I shall conclude. As the leading articles of Christian Faith are but few, so it is obvious to remark, that the system of Christian Morality, being consistent and uniform, is capable of being

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comprised

comprised under a few general rules of behaviour. Thus "the end of the commandment is "charity out of a pure heart, and good conscience, and faith unfeigned," In another place it is summed up in "Faith working by love." But our blessed Lord and his beloved Disciple conclude it all under "love," the love of God and man:---In this can we do otherwise than admire the wisdom and goodness of God who has thus given a law which, being comprehended in the one great principle of Charity, is written in the tablet of all hearts, leaving the most simple, as well as the learned, without ignorance of duty in every case to which a rule of duty can be wanted to apply !

And, secondly, another consequence which is applicable to the subject of Faith, as well as of Morality, and is of the greatest import, is to be deduced from the consistency, and at the same time, the detached and irregular form in which the truths of the Gospel are delivered; I mean that those who perversely or fastidiously insist that any point of doctrine is not so precisely worded in any passage as they require, may be referred not only to other texts containing the same doctrine on other occasions, but also, with particular advantage, to the general tenor, or, as we may say, context of Revelation, and be

¶ 1 Tim. i. 5.

† Gal. v. 6.

refuted

refuted by arguments drawn from Analogy. And it is highly important and satisfactory to us to remember that, on account of this consistency in the midst of that variety of form and diversity of occasions * under which it is revealed, and by the means of which the same truth is repeatedly to be found in many different parts of the Holy Writings, it ought to make no difference in the peace and assurance of our minds, that one or, it may be, more texts of note may be by any means defective, corrupted, or redundant. For while the constituent parts of our Faith and Morality are thus preserved in numberless indisputable passages of God's Word, we can still draw from thence, by sound and correct inference, whatever is necessary to both, and still continue, without any mixture of doubt or anxiety, in that joy and serenity of mind which, on such a subject, Truth alone is able to give.

* It deserves to be also noticed, that it is by means of these that many orthodox writers have unwarily adduced texts to the proof of some points to which they are not adequate or directly adapted. Conscious that these points, such as the Divinity of Christ, and others objected against, are abundantly proved by many passages and the general tenor of Scripture, they have often referred, without the attention requisite for an accurate distinction, to improper places. Many of these, however, it is at the same time to be observed, though they are not sufficient to prove the question, yet should undoubtedly be understood to include likewise the sense thus attributed, without which they would lose part of the force and effect that they now carry with them.— This want of accuracy, from which our Divines are gradually recovering, has given an opportunity, which the wretched reasoners on the side of heresy and infidelity have used, to deny the unavoidable consequence of apposite texts, because others had been also brought forward which were inapposite.



S E R M O N VI.

I C O R. XIV. 33.

*For God is not the author of confusion
but of peace, as in all Churches of
the Saints.*

THE plan thus far pursued, according to which the Credibility and Nature of the Revelation on which Christianity is built, have been the object of discussion, leads naturally to the contemplation of those Establishments relating to it, which the judgment of Men has modelled, and their authority enjoined: which, while the records of religion contain as it were the soul and spirit, encompass it with an external, visible form, which, therefore, ought to be adapted to its nature and operations.

Previously to any remark on this topic it is, first, obvious to notice the necessity of subordi-

nation and obedience to government in general. No long argument, surely, is here necessary; for the constant experience of mankind must ever readily shew to all, that without them none of the benefits derived on a state of civilized life by the appropriate and assigned labours of individuals, and the restraint or redress of all those disorders which the passions of a corrupted nature are perpetually ready to produce, can be secured to society. To effect these purposes, so evidently requisite to the private and public security, happiness and advantage of men, Authority and Power must reside in some particular persons: and therefore this, we are told on the authority of Scripture, as every other consequence necessarily arising out of the nature of things, proceeds from the will of God.

To facilitate the administration of this authority, the necessity of a certain System of Laws, and known Order of fulfilling the charge committed, and also of external circumstances of Dignity and Splendor adapted to raise or preserve a due veneration for the persons so entrusted in the minds of all, especially the weak and licentious, arises out of the same general constitution of human nature. It therefore, to be short on this subject, argues folly to aim at any thing else, than at making the wisest use of these means,

means, that the accidental situation of each country enables it to contrive and establish.

The Apostle in my text asserts this doctrine to be applicable also to the constitution of the Christian church. And surely it is plain that as Christians are men, and the visible Church likewise comprehends members of all degrees of faith and virtue, it must be immediately applicable to this as to every human community. It is therefore only perhaps worth while farther to remark, that the Apostle's assertion derives an extraordinary obligation upon us, since in this case of the Corinthians, even the miraculous effusions of the Holy Spirit, which were then commonly granted, are enjoined to be subject to the controul of public order and ceremony. It is needless to apply this at length to the disorderly pretensions of modern Enthusiasts.

I shall not undertake to prove that each national church has a right to ordain its own system of ecclesiastical offices, laws, and all external concerns, since this is obviously and naturally to be supposed, unless the contrary could be proved from Holy Scripture. But this point is now out of all question. I shall proceed to observe, that all those institutions which are enjoined

therein, as of perpetual authority, are preserved and sanctioned by the laws of this country.

In the first instance that suggests itself, the appointment of an officiating Ministry, this is clearly the case, as appears from the writings of St. Paul. In the first epistle to Timothy, whom he had settled at Ephesus, the several Orders of Bishop and Deacon,* and afterwards of Elders† in the ministry, ‡ are expressly mentioned, and are represented as subject to his authority, who was, as Bishop of that district, supreme over them all. In the same chapter, their Ordination by the imposition of hands from this superior minister, accompanied, as the preceding chapter also seems to inform us, by the laying on of the hands by the Presbytery, is mentioned as a regular form of it, as likewise in other places. But when, in general, no farther injunctions appear, nor any intimation that all these degrees of ministry were necessarily to be adopted in every assembly of Christians, for on the contrary it rather seems that these orders were varied according to the circumstances of each Church,

* Chap. iii.

† Chap. v. 17, 18.

‡ The Elders spoken of, chap. v. 1. are only the older members of the Church.—See Titus i. 5, 6, 7. Here an Elder was appointed for each city as Bishop, which the term therefore sometimes signified, as it also denoted the Apostles, 1 Pet. v. 1, 2. So also the term Bishop was attributed to the Apostles, Acts i. 20. and to Christ himself, 1 Pet. ii. 25. In these instances the latitude observable was suited to the simplicity of that early period.

an argument for a right in each community of determining in this, and all such points of ceremony according to its own conveniency, might, if it were necessary, be hence deduced. And in this opinion, so subversive of the claim of any foreign power to impose arbitrary and general laws on the Catholic Church, the free spirit of the Gospel, and the practice and declarations of the early Churches, previously to and during the gradual usurpations of the See of Rome, join to confirm our liberty.*

The question that immediately follows this, is concerning the Persons in whose hands within each department the supreme authority ought to be vested; as also in general concerning the relative Rights of Civil and Ecclesiastical Things and Persons. On these subjects, it is first of great moment that we should lay down this plain position; that the spiritual service which is enjoined by God, cannot necessarily interfere with the Order of Civil Society, which is also the work of the same Author. Agreeably to this axiom, under the first persecution of Christians by the civil power, obedience was enjoined, even to that odious and infamous prince, who employed his authority, established not long before by usurpation, to the purpose of an unwarrantable oppression.† Under every outward

* Art. XXXIV. † Rom. xiii. 1, &c.

state of the Church the Gospel obliges its members, by every thing they can do, to “live peaceably with all men;” * and our Lord and his great Apostle St. Paul have shewed an example, which all their successors are obliged to imitate, by practising this rule themselves, and teaching it to others. † Hence, therefore, they must live conformably to the laws and customs of the people with whom they are united under one government, as far as is not plainly contrary to the laws of the Gospel. But the Christian Religion is established in all its essential points, when its professors may hallow that Day which is consecrated by Divine Command, preach his Word, celebrate his Worship, and observe those Sacraments which our blessed Lord has annexed as necessary to his covenant, and are not compelled to do any thing which is plainly forbidden in the Scriptures : when, according to our Lord’s and his Apostles’ injunctions and practice, the Ordination of the Ministry is reserved to their successors, and the performance of the Offices of religious worship is appropriated to the Clerical order. And while a violation of these particulars must be avoided with meekness and patience, though with constancy, the same Gospel requires that in judging what is lawful we should beware of mistake, and be careful lest under a pretence only of the law of God, we should resist the

* Rom. xii. 18. † Matth. xvii. 17. 1 Cor. ix. 1—23.

lawful commands of men, remembering that submission to human government is one instance of obedience to Divine Authority.

From this statement duly considered the conclusion is undeniable, that in a country where not only these few essential points, but, thanks to God, much more is provided for under a Christian Government, true Religion cannot be at all a just pretext of civil disturbance. Wishes indeed may and must be constantly entertained by the Rulers of the Church and others, that the civil power may yield to their request, when made, in sanctioning such measures as appear better calculated than others to attain the end of all ecclesiastical establishment, the edification of the community: but it would be contrary to their duty either to propose what might offend, or to seek it by offensive means. We are, as Subjects, only still, if possible, more bound to submit to the dictates of the magistrate, when, as Christians, we are obliged, so far as we can, to become all things unto our brethren.

Farther, it is not only our duty on account of peace, but is the part of all who would avoid an Absurdity of conduct, not to create public dissensions on the score of imperfection in religious establishments. For, surely, it is the necessary consequence of the nature of things, that no human

human system or compilation should be perfect, should not have more or fewer faults. When therefore any one, free from the before-named essential errors, has been carefully compleated, nay moreover has been revised with diligence, as in this country, and finally settled by national authority ; as there is no chance of making it perfect, and there is danger or inconvenience in innovation, it is clearly unreasonable to disturb the public peace by opposition to the system thus established.

Still greater is the obligation to acquiescence, not only on account of national prosperity and private happiness, but because unanimity is confessedly the guardian of all piety and virtue. For where animosity and strife follow, as they must do in the train of public dissension, there is not only " confusion, but every evil work," " the fruit of righteousness being only sown in " peace of them that make peace." It is, I apprehend, needless to shew farther, how small and unworthy a compensation a supposed or even real emendation of an unessential defect can make for the mischief that attends on the violation of public harmony.

This argument, therefore, if just, is sufficient to defend the cause perhaps of every national reformed Church against those who refuse a participation

participation of it. But I feel it impossible for one who has lived in communion with the Church of England, not to rise higher in his vindication of her authority, than to a mere defence of her doctrine and discipline in common with other systems. Her ministers appeal to the impartial sense of every temperate man who is conversant with her worship, including that of strangers, who have lavished their commendations on it, whether it be not *highly* simple, decent, and orderly in its Administration, *grave, correct*, and sublime in its Devotions; and assert, with the utmost confidence of honest men, that its Articles and Discipline are also highly pure, moderate, and charitable, every way deserving of the adherence of a Christian, free and enlightened people; of a people who, sensible of the necessity of some establishment in these points, to be received with one accord by all the fellow subjects of the same civil government, and aware of imperfection in all human plans, rejoice to find that what is enjoined to them is first clear of all criminal stain, and having been entered upon with the best intentions on the sole authority of scripture, and conducted with charity and moderation, has been executed with a very great degree of wisdom and ability.

It might therefore have been expected that the Christian subjects of such a country should have
been

been contented with their lot, if an opposition to every system that is imposed, were not notoriously the consequence of a weak and depraved mind in all ages and countries. In descending into the particulars that compose our Establishment, some of those that are objected against occur, which may be passed over here, as being less important, or as being most of them, less the object of present regard. Such I conceive to be the Homilies and the Canons of the Church, as, likewise, those immaterial improprieties in her Liturgy and Administration, against which objections have been raised.

As to the Articles of her Faith and Discipline, they indeed deserve a particular attention; especially from the Teachers of Religion, who are bound by their subscription to defend them. It is obviously sufficient in the consent that is required from other members of the community, that, as far as they are able to judge, they see no contradiction in them to the Holy Writings. They are a common bond of Christian society, framed for the purpose of preserving the Church from the maintenance of such opinions as are thought most likely to be entertained, or brought forward, against the cause of truth and harmony.

If we are asked, on what any national Church founds its right of prescribing articles of communion,

munion, we are ready to answer, the Necessity, evident from reason and experience, of doing whatever is essential to the securing of peace, that is not criminal. And, surely, no argument can prove that to add the sanction of human authority, for this purpose, to what was commanded before by the word of God, can be contrary to Liberty, or, in any way, detrimental to Society. This is all which our Church attempts to do, on account either of those errors which were dangerous to the salvation of men, or of those which were effectual, by the animosity of the party who supported them, to tear the Church into factions, a state of things equally inconsistent with the design and tendency of Christianity. But this is not all. Whoever considers either of these objects, will see that the well-being, if not existence, of Civil Government is involved in the subject. It were easy to shew that the want of Christian principles leads to depravity of Moral Conduct, and that this tends to the injury and violation of all the rights and blessings of social life. And again, it is no less obvious that Party Contentions on points of Religion, are not only equally, but more than on any other subjects adapted to effect, by kindling a more furious and obstinate zeal, the most violent public commotions, and thence to endanger the constitution of any state. It is therefore necessary for every government, for the sake of its
own

own security, for the peace, for the prosperity, for the private happiness and comfort of every individual, to give, beside its sanction for religious purposes, its encouragement to some one system of worship, doctrine, and discipline; and for that end to disable its adversaries from overturning it by a mean that is clear of all persecution, namely by a negative one, by withholding from them that influence of civil power which every government is to dispose of only as it judges best for the public good, delegating it into the hands of those who are *every way interested* to preserve it, and thereby the whole nation, secure and unmolested.

It is a matter of the greatest importance that we should, in judging of the Articles and Creeds of the English or any national Church, consider them, chiefly as retrospective, arising out of the necessity of experience, in order to prevent a return of serious evils which have in former times been sorely felt. Some of these evils are common to all or many societies, others peculiar to each, as it has been differently susceptible of them by incidental circumstances. And, farther, as this consideration of such evils convinces us of the reasonableness of this defence, so it also will dispose us to submit our judgment in the contemplation of each article unto the superior information of the Church and State, respecting the exigencies

gencies that required it; at least, to use great caution how we differ in opinion from such authority; and especially never to decide against it in those points wherein men of ability and integrity do not agree in their sentiments. And still we are alway to remember, with the great seriousness which such a consideration deserves, that where the Church is confessedly mistaken, yet on questions of mere propriety or convenience to separate publickly from the communion of the Church, or to loosen the attachment of any person to it, is sinful before God the Author of peace and order, and Him who is the Head of the whole body.

In this disposition of mind, to which the nature of the case thus evidently obliges us, the Church of England wishes its members to review its Articles, and is then sure of receiving a ready tribute of applause for their Orthodoxy, Moderation, and general Utility to them as Christians and Citizens. We are fully persuaded that the result of such a review will be the conclusion, as far as they are able to judge, that all are as agreeable to Scripture and Reason as those which have been incidentally shewn to be so. These were selected on account of their peculiarly apparent difficulty: and it is confidently hoped, that the mode of considering them which has been suggested will, if pursued,

avail to the rendering every sincere member of our communion satisfied and happy in it.

One subject however, included in these articles, remains, which at this time claims a particular notice. It has not only been attacked with argument and ridicule by the enemies of our establishment, but from its liability to misrepresentation gives particular dissatisfaction and uneasiness to good men among ourselves. I mean the Confession under the name of the Athanasian Creed, which is sanctioned by the Articles, and adopted into the Liturgy of our Church. Some able writers have endeavoured to stem this torrent of prejudice and mistake, and have done it justice by their arguments. It concerns every person who wishes well to truth and peace to join his aid in the same important task, and to endeavour to shew that our Church in this particular has preserved the principles, not only of the same orthodoxy, but of the same moderation and charity, that have so eminently distinguished her other proceedings.

Of the Trinitarian Doctrine, which it so directly asserts, I have attempted already to prove the propriety ; and the other points in this creed there is no occasion to discuss, as they are common to it with others. The great questions with which, I conceive, we are concerned, are the propriety

propriety of imposing so minute an Exposition of the most abstracted doctrine of Religion upon the minds of the believers, and the justness of its assertion that whoever does not believe the tenet of a Trinity in Unity, and the Scriptural Doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, is lost to the Hope of everlasting life.*

Now, in general, previously to the discussion of other questions of this kind, it would not appear immaterial to remark a difference that certainly exists between the expression of a person's sentiments on any publick business by himself, and his consent to the adoption of that of another. In the first case it would be said that every part ought to be an accurate representation of the whole of his own ideas. Whereas in the other there might be reasons why a certain latitude of indulgence should be permitted. Every person conversant in publick transactions, knows that such accommodation is through the imperfection of humanity requisite to their accomplishment, as this is to the good of society. Even farther: in the case of Confessions that had been

* This assertion is plainly not extended to the expositions accompanying these two Articles of Faith, which are in fact only arguments or proofs adduced from Scripture, and are to be included in Parentheses; viz. from the words in the 5th verse to the clause, "He therefore that will be saved, &c." And again from the words "God of the substance &c." to the words "God and man is one Christ;" inclusively.

drawn up by any Church for itself, if they were of great antiquity, an immaterial variation of sentiment, and, much more, an inaccuracy of expression, might happen to be more than counterbalanced by many circumstantial reasons that called for its reception or continuation. But when, as in the case of the Athanasian Creed, the question respects an excellent composition, for ages established by public authority in the Catholick Church, framed against a most important heresy, wherein to make any innovation would prepare matter for fresh controversies; in such a case it seems to be within the apprehension of every man, that slight improprieties, could such have been discovered, which did not interfere with the end designed by it, ought not to debar men from the advantage to be derived from its authority and merit. To confirm this assertion we may observe, that after this manner men of the greatest wisdom act in the most important affairs of this world. Where in matters of Right and Property immemorial custom and continual decisions have inured to establish any particular kind of possession, it would not be allowed on account of any slight or apparent impropriety to set it aside, lest the system of law should be disarranged, and the confidence and peace of society be disturbed.

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This argument, however, is not wanted; since we do assert, with a perfect, and unaffected confidence, that this Creed fully appears to be framed in every respect according to truth and prudence; and invite every sincere member of our communion to weigh the justification to which its ministers assert its claim, and the detection of that mistake and prejudice which have biased men to esteem it immoderate and uncharitable. And, surely, it must be the desire of all good men, that what the Church has received may be found worthy of approbation, and their wish, to guard jealousy against the shallow deceits, which the passions of our nature offer to impose upon us, through popular misapprehension, artifices of interested men, or our own too slight and hasty consideration.

In examining the first objection, respecting the Exposition contained, we persuade ourselves that if it be true, which needs not to be proved, that the Creed in respect to this account of the Trinitarian Doctrine is only somewhat less requisite than at first, and is still necessary, this objection is in a train to be soon removed; for it is reduced to the question, whether the necessities of the Church could make the adoption of such an exposition proper. And in such a

question, if the arguments on each side could even be so equal, as to leave a doubt whether such a particular illustration of the articles of Faith were proper or not, the authority of the Church, the prescriptive title which this Confession has to our regard, and the cause of peace and union ought to intercede that it may be readily and chearfully acquiesced in. But surely the question appears to be decided on a view of the cause for which the whole Creed was drawn up, namely, the heresies, particularly the Arian, that corrupted the Faith imposed by Revelation, and disturbed the quiet of the world. The suppression of such evils is surely sufficient to justify an addition to the simplicity of more ancient forms of confession. It is needless to expatiate on the extent and fatal tendency of such calamities, which history alone can represent, by a copious narrative of every evil to Religion and Virtue, or to civil happiness, that error, discord, and violence can ever bring together on the theatre of the world. Now the constitution of every defence must be adapted to the nature and circumstances of the assault. While the enemies of the Gospel were those without its fold, who denied its claim to all reception, its authority was to be asserted from its Prophecies, Miracles, and its influence on the demeanor of its followers. Afterwards, when Churches were
established,

established, and its enemies became more and more those of its own household, an injunction was laid on its teachers to hold fast the “form of sound words,” to attend carefully to the perfectness of their doctrine. St. John’s Gospel was also then lastly written in refutation of those who raised ill-grounded fables on the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as to enforce and explain that point more fully and minutely than it had before been done. Thus the matter naturally proceeded, till the form of sound words was, perhaps gradually as new heretical opinions arose, determined in the form which is called the Apostle’s Creed.* This then, it will be remembered, is far more extensive than the primary form of confession required of those who were admitted to baptism by the Apostles. The same process is said to have happened afterwards in the construction of the Nicene Creed, which was first framed, and then enlarged on account of particular heresies.† And lastly this, commonly called the Creed of Athanasius, as our Liturgy cautiously describes it, was composed against the many errors that then divided the Church. Thus, according to this short and plain relation, the necessity of the case, and the

* Mosheim Eccles. Hist. I. P. 116, 117.

† Wheatley on the Liturgy. P. 251.

example of the primitive Church, warrant the procedure.

The reply will probably be, first, that these heresies did not require so diffuse a paraphrase to be imposed as a creed on all Christians: and if so, it is burthenfome, and therefore unwarrantable.* In answer, it may be observed that the reply is far from being founded in truth. The exposition is still simple and concise, mentioning only such points as either guard us immediately against the heresy of believing three Gods, or denying the Divinity of the second and third Persons, or against such tenets as would unavoidably and directly lead to that heresy, and are palpably inconsistent with the Christian Faith † on this article.

Secondly, to the prevalent objection, that an assent is required from the unlearned Christian to explanations and terms which he cannot understand, the answer, as I presume, again should be, that it is unfounded in fact. The mystery of

* See note, page 13.

† It is become necessary to remark that this Creed, which is simply a representation of the Scripture Doctrine, is far from attempting a positive explanation of mysterious truths, for it guards against such an attempt, and rather tells us what we are *not* to suppose. It is in fact, as we might expect from the end it was framed to answer, negative, and in contradiction of those errors which had prevailed.

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the Trinity is indeed unintelligible; but it is equally so to all, both learned and unlearned. But the explanations and distinctions which this Creed lays before us, are, like the Revelation of Scripture on which they are founded, easily intelligible, and to all, for they are easily to be explained by those, whose office it is to explain the articles of Faith, to the most unlettered minds. But this objection would be idle even if the fact were otherwise. And if, for want of this proper explanation, there are those who remain strangers to the terms therein used, I presume to assert that this Creed may still, without any absurdity or any harm, be retained in the Liturgy. It is plainly necessary to suppose, according to what has been hitherto advanced on this subject, that our Church adopts it for the use of those who may be misled by the errors which it refutes, and as far as they may be misled. It therefore cannot be conceived in these parts to concern at all the uninformed Believer, who has no more to do than to acquiesce in their being recited for the benefit of that part in each congregation who are interested in it. And this, in the present inquisitive and sceptical age, is far from being an inconsiderable part in many.

Agreeably

Agreeably to the several considerations now brought forward, it is lastly to be observed, that this Creed, as we know, is not made a part of the ordinary service of the Church, or put on the same footing with the Nicene, as neither is this with the Apostle's Creed. At the same time it was, and, we are persuaded, with the strictest propriety, thought fit that it should be kept alive in the memory and reflection of Christians; and for this purpose, and none could be better, that it should be from time to time recited in the Church on stated days, some few of which were chosen on the score of peculiar propriety, and the rest in order to preserve a regularity in its return.

And as this censure on the Creed may be shewn to be weak and ill-founded, so may the second on the Uncharitableness of its Denunciations. For, to treat it shortly, it is, first, to be well attended to by those who are alarmed on this account, that the Clauses do not regard and are not understood to apply to those persons, who misled by other men, or by any means consistent with sincerity and diligence, are blind to the true perception of the Catholick Faith. And therefore, none but the sincere and diligent
having

having on any account a claim to the benefits of the Gospel Covenant, on this view of the matter, the objection may be deemed invalid.

It is also to be remembered that the clauses are necessarily and properly applicable only to the positions, “ that the Trinity in Unity is to “ be worshipped,” and that “ the Incarnation of “ our Lord ” is to be believed, and both agreeably to the doctrine of Scripture concerning them : I say, of Scripture : for it is scarcely needful to observe that the sentence is not denounced, as if the sin consisted in erring against the Catholick Faith because it is the Faith of the Church, but because it is the Faith imposed by the word of God. The proper and true vindication of the Creed therefore appears to be the fact, that it is directed solely against those who from a criminal carelessness, or worse cause, refuse or pervert the doctrines of the Gospel. And who can pronounce a church to be uncharitable, because she warns her members that such people are condemned by the sentence of God ? Who that does throw such a blame is clear, I do not say of uncharitableness, but of a gross misapprehension of the Divine Will ? need he be reminded of the necessity unto salvation of believing whatever is revealed ? or must he be referred to such denunciations in Scriptures as
that

that of our Lord in the Apocalypse, “ I testify
 “ ‘unto every man that heareth the words of the
 “ prophecy of this book, If any man shall add
 “ unto these things, God shall add unto him the
 “ plagues that are written in this book : and if
 “ any man shall take away from the words of
 “ the book of this prophecy, God shall take
 “ away his part out of the book of life, and out
 “ of the Holy City, and from the things that
 “ are written in this book ?” * One cannot
 but suppose that men who think themselves at
 liberty to believe as they will, or those who are
 persuaded that it is an indifferent or immaterial
 thing whether they receive some articles of faith
 or no, have forgotten that our duty to the
 Almighty God is the first and great concern of
 our being; that he has a right to be believed;
 and that not to attach our hearts and minds to
 what he has been pleased to communicate, is a
 slight of him, or a rebellion against him. Here-
 in lieth the sinfulness, a moral depravity of heart,
 of which our Creed warns us to beware. And
 is there any one that has read the Scripture, who
 can say that any sin unrepented leads not unto
 eternal death ? Or, will the most high God, who
 for the violation of a merely positive command,

* Deut. iv. 2,—4. xii. 32. Prov. xxx. 5, 6. The reason
 assigned for the necessity of this entire obedience is a resignation
 of their will to that of God. See the first of these passages.

exiled mankind from Paradise and the Tree of Life, who also has since conducted through its several stages the œconomy of Redemption, till the Eternal Son, by a stupendous instance of mercy, assumed the form of his own creatures, and under that suffered the utmost ignominy and misery of which it was capable, and concluded all by a death on the cross in order to save us by the faith he taught ; I say, will the Most High excuse those, for of such be it remembered we are speaking, who treat with carelessness, or handle with perverseness, any thing which He hath thought fit to teach us concerning Himself? Surely not. The Grace and Truth which are in these last days brought to light are so far from excusing any the least defect in our disposition towards God, that nothing but the utmost sincerity and care will now be accepted, or able through the merits of Christ to save us from the wrath to come. Religion is now arrived at its greatest strictness, in the duties towards God and Man exacting the greatest perfectness. In the latter the Evangelical Sermon on the Mount informs that the mere evil disposition of the heart is able to bring man into the “ danger of Hell “ Fire.” And the mercy of God, if it does not lead us unto such perfect repentance, will only deliver us over to the more terrible execution of his justice. That this is the constant tenor of
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the Holy Writings, I believe none will deny. Let them consider whether it be safe to rest their persuasion on any other authority.

In fine, if to this view of the question we add the infinite injury done by these men to others, through the bad example which they set, and the divisions which they cause in the Church of Christ, and also the importance of the points themselves to the Christian Religion, it appears, I think, on the whole plainly and unquestionably, that the Athanasian Creed, far from being uncharitable, is strictly right, and coincident with the language and temper of Divine Revelation.

I shall conclude these observations with a remark that suggests itself in consequence of the survey hitherto taken of Christianity, and the Profession of its doctrines adopted in this country. If it be true that all these, as far as they concern every man to know them, are still plain and easy of perception, few in number, and consistent with each other, it follows that there is no reason against an early Education in religious opinions on account of guarding against prejudice. This might be worth considering in deep, intricate, and extensive sciences; but is out of the
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the question, where the mistake of every honest mind may easily without delay be shewn and corrected by the frequent express declarations, and constant tenor and analogy of the Holy Writings. At the same time, if the end of such opinions be to produce those habits of temper and conduct which form the good man, no one who knows the least of human nature, does not see the necessity of implanting them from the first, lest a corrupted soil bring forth its own fruits. It is indeed strange that any man should have gone so wide of all that nature, reason, and experience teach on the subject of education, as to declare against the propriety of such a measure. And this leads to another subject, concerning which but little needs to be argued. Considered as a safeguard and auxiliary to this education, I presume that Infant-Baptism, especially as solemnized in the Church of England, is deservedly held in high veneration. When we take into the account the rite of Confirmation which is ordained to follow it, if there be nothing in the Gospel which plainly orders the Sacrament to be celebrated at any other time of life, it seems quite sufficient to justify the appointment. But the plain fact surely is, that it is exactly conformed to the authority of the Scriptures, being the precise counterpart and substitute of the Sacrament of Circumcision, which, we know,

was

was by God's own ordinance observed on the eighth day. This must be evident to those who compare the nature and end of both institutions, who will see that if any thing can be said against the observance of Infant-Baptism, it must apply equally against that of Infant-Circumcision. Both are outward signs of entering into a Covenant, the actual embracing and observing of which belong rather to maturer years, which is conditional, and therefore becomes void as to the acceptance of the initiated persons by God, if their hearts and conduct are not to the end of their days upright before him. This coincidence of the institutions, and of their observance, is also such as might be expected from the relation between the Law and the Gospel, the Type and Anti-type in the Divine Oeconomy, whence the positive ordinances of one were framed to shadow out those of the other. It is thus farther confirmed by, and in its turn establishes the perfect resemblance between the other Christian Sacrament and the Jewish Feasts on Sacrifice, particularly that of the Passover. This last was in commemoration of that saving Blood of the Lamb which exempted them alone from the hand of the destroying angel, and was an ordinance appointed for ever with the same power of preserving from his hand in future those who kept

kept it. The other was expressly instituted in the room of this and the other sacrificial ordinances, and is significative of the sacrifice of the real Lamb of God without spot, that was offered on the cross, and conveys to the faithful partaker of it the efficacy of that Blood, which was shed to save mankind from the eternal destruction that awaits those who neglect or refuse the covenanted mercies of God.



S E R M O N VII.

I C O R. XI. 19.

*For there must be also heresies among
you.**

NOtwithstanding the conclusion to which a review of the Doctrines and Establishment of our Church ought to lead us, that they may be justified to the apprehension of all, even unlearned men, a question is asked, on which a great stress is commonly laid, Whence is it then that so many people are of a different opinion?

I answer first, with confidence, for I speak under the authority of St. Paul, as well as on the testimony of general experience, that opposition to received sentiments, however plausibly

* Matth. xviii. 7. Mark ix. 49, 50. See also Luke xii. 49, 51.

and vehemently it be carried on, and embraced by numbers, is never in itself sufficient proof that they deserve to be suspected by reasonable and honest men. For if it were, the Apostle's own constitution of the Corinthian Church would have been justly concluded liable to censure, as also that of others which he and the rest of the Apostles established; whose writings abound with intimations of the doctrines and factions against which they had to contend. From this first epistle which St. Paul addressed to the Corinthians, we learn that contentions had already arisen among the members of that Church,* who were incited by some to lessen or reject the authority of the Apostle. This he mentions in the first place, and afterwards notices another instance of their untractableness; "When ye come together in the Church, I hear that there be Divisions among you; and I partly believe it;" adding, "for there must be also Heresies among you." There was indeed a considerable one at that time, namely, a denial of the resurrection of the body, which he therefore combats towards the conclusion of the epistle.† This was followed in the Christian Church by many others: and, after the Apostolic times, the history of Christianity is unhappily filled with little else than the account of opinions

* 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

† xv. 12. See 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

inconsistent

Inconsistent with common sense, the plain tenor of the Scriptures, and with one another, maintained by all degrees and kinds of persons, which have disturbed the Faith and peace of mankind.

If this be the case, there is no necessity that the question which has been put, should in the least perplex us, or create any suspicion of the lawfulness of our national establishment. It will perhaps conduce to confirm us against such an apprehension, if we consider more particularly the reasoning implied in the assertion of my text. It is forcible and plain.

The Apostle had been informed, and it should seem on good authority, of some divisions in his Church of Corinth; and yet he professes to rest his chief assurance that they did exist, on some internal cause why they would take place, a cause so strong that it amounted to a Necessity; and this not only of their existence, but farther also of the existence of Heresies among them. For the principles and seeds of these calamities were implanted in the nature of men and things, and must therefore in time produce their proper effects. To this is also subjoined a concomitant reason, after the manner not unusual in Holy

Scripture,* “ That they which are approved
“ may be manifest among you.

What this Necessity is, and in what particulars it chiefly consists, it is highly interesting to consider; as it will also, by bringing into view the dangers that are, as it were, within and all around us, incite us to a caution against the snares to which, together with all other communities, we must ourselves likewise be exposed.†

In the first class of these necessary causes of error, and above all the rest to which the authority of St. Paul engages our attention, is the narrowness of our intellectual capacity; by reason of which, those who are not aware of it, are certain of falling into mistake in all researches that are above the sphere of men. How this is a great immediate cause of error in Theology, has been already represented, ‡ and therefore

* Luke ii. 35. Matth. x. 34, &c.

† It may be proper to advertise the reader that my omission in this argument of the temptation of Evil Spirits among the causes of Heresy, by no means proceeds from any disbelief or doubt of their agency. I think no point more clearly revealed in Scripture, than this; that as the Holy Spirit does in some manner influence the human mind to good purposes, so the great enemy in like manner influences it to bad. Matth. xiii. 39. Joh. viii. 44.

‡ Left. IV. page 86, and at the end.

needs

needs not be enlarged on. It has been, I trust, shewn that such topics are the proper objects of Faith, rather than discussion, and that the chief concern of our Reason is to examine the Evidence on which they claim to have been revealed from God.

Secondly, under the head of such subjects as are within the reach of human abilities, it is obvious that there are many circumstances, which when they are incurred, will necessarily occasion men to miss of the attainment of truth. The world is full of the errors that have been committed on all subjects at all times through their influence. Thus then Religion is also by the same means opposed or perverted. A defect of natural abilities incident to some persons subjects them in a deep and critical enquiry on many points, to a false conclusion, even where they are indubitably plain to a man of superior sagacity. This misfortune, which includes also such as labour under any kind of infirmity that affects the vigour and acuteness of the mind, it is to be observed, comprehends no small part of mankind. Weak and distempered persons usually err in all difficult matters that interest them, and are apt to be overcome by any specious objection or plausible argument that applies to their conscience, their feelings, or their prejudices. They have not that perfect, that ready use of

their faculties, or that steadiness of mind, which might support them against these dangers, and the assaults of those who aim to deceive; in some degree partaking of the condition of such as attempt matters beyond the power of all men.

Similar to this is the situation of a still more numerous class, who possess of moderate or eminent genius, err because they institute their researches into subjects, for the discussion of which they are not duly prepared. For every art and science, at least those of the higher class, demand some previous attainments, some acquired ability in such as hope to possess a thorough and sound knowledge. Theology, including the science of Ethics, must surely therefore not be approached without suitable preparation by him who hopes to become a competent professor of its doctrines. He must be sufficiently instructed in questions relating to the authenticity of its records, the languages with which it is connected, the history of events which preceded and have accompanied it to his own time: he must have qualified himself to distinguish the nice boundaries of truth and falsehood, of virtue and vice, to detect the sophistry of subtle reasoning, to reconcile the seeming contradictions, and combine the several parts of an irregular and most extensive history of facts,

facts, and a desultory system of doctrines. Who is not possessed of these acquirements, can evidently neither know the ground on which any controverted question in Theology stands, or the method in which it is to be argued, nor form a clear definite conclusion on any casuistical point, nor unravel the deception which an indistinct or ill conducted argument weaves to ensnare the mind.

Is it therefore, to conclude this topic, any wonder, or is it of any importance to us, that mistakes are made in some points by the naturally weak or professionally unlearned objector? Is it not commonly obvious that in the other theories which concern human life, such persons perpetually commit errors, and require constant correction of them at the hands of the able professors of such sciences? Do not the popular opinions held by these numerous heretics, as it were, aim their ineffectual blow even against the general authority and reputation of the professions themselves, as practised in their own time? If so, and the arts of Polity, of Law, and of Medicine, felt by all to be necessary, and universally by candid and intelligent men acknowledged to be, in general, skilfully administered, are thus liable to opposition and cavil, there is no reason that a system of Religion and a religious Establishment should be exempted

empted from the same treatment among the infirm and unlearned. Indeed it will appear that Religion with its Establishments must always be a topic of more numerous and violent objections than any others, and yet may, like those others, be at the same time far removed from any just reason of rejection or abuse.

In the remaining class of those who are likely to become enemies to the true apprehension of religious matters, as well as of any other system of knowledge, I place all such, as possessed of natural abilities and sufficient attainments, yet mis of the end aimed at through some misconduct of their own. This might be displayed in many instances which have been prejudicial to the literary pursuits of mankind. Among the principal may be named, a want of Resolution to encounter the difficulties that oppose them with the force of painful investigation; a want of Method in the prosecution of their researches, which distracts and entangles the mind, disabling it from a rightful process to a just and accurate conclusion; of a patient Perseverance in following the path of such investigation through all its arduous and intricate labyrinths to the end; of a disposition to pay that Deference to the wisdom and integrity of others which is respectively due to them; of equal Firmness and Moderation, and therefore, lastly, a want of that great qualification

fication without which all the advantages that can be named are utterly of no avail, an Indifference to the complexion of that discovery to which these inquiries lead, a sincere pursuit not of victory but of truth, at least a honest preparation of heart to acknowledge and embrace the conclusion in which the pains thus employed shall happen to terminate.

This Review of inabilities and defects, which is presumed to be just, leads to remark a division of deluded men into two classes, between which it concerns us much to make a great difference; I mean, into such as derive their errors from the mistake of the Understanding only, and those who owe them to the corruptness of their Heart. The first, as we are men, whose character is weakness, challenge our pity, our regard, and even our respect. They are often among the sincerest and best of men; and their opinions often arise out of their reverence to God or benevolence to man. To these Heresy does not belong in the malignity of the term, or rather is not, in the common acceptation, at all applicable. They never proceed to range themselves under her standard; or soon quit the field to those unto whom the Scriptures assign it. For it is to be remarked, that their conduct ever
entitles

entitles them to such a distinction. As humble members of a community, they are not forward to insist on the certainty of their own opinions, but pay a just respect to the wisdom of an established majority: as candid, they are disposed to acknowledge the general integrity of it: as peaceable, they do not place themselves at the head of a faction, or plunge into open party, or withdraw themselves farther than their sentiments strictly oblige. And, what is of the highest importance to themselves and the Church, they are, by these circumstances, the peculiar advantage of a thoroughly good man, almost certain, sooner or later, through the information of others or maturer consideration, of recovering that truth from which they had unintentionally departed.* If this be undeniable, it follows that those only remain under the description of Heretics, who owe their opinions or the maintenance of them to the great cause mentioned in the second place, the influence of a corrupted heart; not to the Difficulty in the subjects of Theology, nor to any Incompetency in the lowest enquirer, as far as he is materially concerned, but to a perverse and obstinate Opposition against that truth which he may discover, and which lies open before his eyes. †

In

* See page 46.

† Tit. iii. 10, 11. I say, perverse and obstinate: for certainly also, as we are men, the utmost compassion and tenderness is due
even

In order to speak at all briefly on a subject which should take in every faulty passion and tendency of the human heart, it is perhaps requisite to adopt the usual distribution of them under the three great heads of Ambition, Avarice, and love of Pleasure; under which, though many particulars will not be severally treated, yet by reason of their analogy they will not have been entirely omitted, and may easily be supplied.

Let us then consider Ambition, and, principally, the desire of being thought by others superior to them and the rest of the world in knowledge, I mean, as far as it may be held to be vicious. In the first place, we shall remember, that it was originally an effectual bar against the admission of a revealed Religion. Humility is essentially necessary to this, as we learn by our Saviour's address to the Jews, "How * can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" Such men could believe neither Moses† nor Christ. Or, if this disposi-

even to wickedness in its first degrees, and as long as it is free from obstinacy. Hence a first and second admonition is enjoined in this text of St. Paul's charge to Titus; and hence St. Jude directs us to make a difference, ver. 22, between one man and another.

* Joh. v. 44. compared with vii. 48, 49. † Joh. v. 45,—47.

tion of mind be in any so far subordinate to reason, as to admit the authenticity and obligation of the Scriptures ; yet in forming a judgment of their meaning, or of the duties which they prescribe to God and man, and the application of their authority to any religious Establishment, what gross errors must it still necessarily produce ? Can the haughtiness of its spirit bear that any or due limits should be assigned to its decisions, through a supposition of natural Inability or want of sufficient Learning ? Will it brook the confinement of Method, or wait for the slow effect of laborious and patient Researches ? Is it prepared to acquiesce in a humble mean opinion of man's nature, in Meekness and Lowliness to others, in a Subordination to the dictates of human appointment, though declared in Scripture to be the will of God ? and lastly, is it able to avail itself of the Instruction, and submit itself to the Corrections which the superior information of other men, at least in some points, renders necessary to all ?

Again ; who knows the temper of Avarice, that can imagine it suited to the discovery of truth, especially that truth which the Gospel affords ? Is it likely to be indifferent to the Nature of those propositions which may be the result of a studious and sincere research ? Is it capable of that Faith in the Integrity and Ability
of

of others without whose testimony knowledge is not to be attained? Can it therefore rightly receive the declarations and expositions of the teachers of Christianity; or, we may ask, even the evidences of the Christian dispensation; and duly apprehend the value of that distant Prize to which the Gospel directs our view? For this temper also, we know, was formerly a wretched hindrance to the reception of the Gospel.* Little can we expect that Charity regarding worldly possessions, and that indifference in all temporal concerns which Christianity teaches; or that such should be successful in defining the relative duties of men to each other. Much less can we look for that deference to a prescribed system of Government and established Order of men, which must be founded on the liberal and large plan of public good. Persons of such a spirit are more likely, in St. Peter's words, to "forfake the right way, and to go astray, following the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,"† and "with feigned words to make merchandize"‡ of men.

But still more impossible is it that the Lovers of Pleasure should be the successful disciples of wisdom. The spirits of men thus disposed are

* Mark x. 2, 4.

† 2 Pet. ii. 15.

‡ 2 Pet. ii. 3.

the least of all fitted for the Constraint of that methodical pursuit which alone leads to success, and for the Resolution and Patience which alone ensure it. At a wider distance are they from a capability of acceding to that doctrine which teaches, as the Scriptures express it, a subordination of the flesh to the spirit; and condemns as wrong and irrational those desires which war against the mind, which prevail over it, not only by weakening its vigour, disarming its powers, and putting them to the rout, but, at length, by leading its very wishes and apprehensions captive to their sway. It is not conceivable that a mind possessed by a habit of Indolence, Levity or voluptuousness, should rise to sentiments very far above the level of the beasts that perish, or apprehend the nature and extent of Christian Moderation and Purity, of a present and future Intercourse with God; nor lastly, can it allow the propriety, or judge rightly of the measure, of those positive restrictions which Divine and human laws have imposed. No; in these and other such instances, it is most of all impossible that truth should be the portion of those who are “lovers of Pleasure more than lovers of God.”

These are some of the reasons why immoral persons are incapable of religious knowledge, at
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the same time that they may profess to have studied such matters. It may be observed that these unhappy people are in Scripture all included under the denomination of Carnal Men, inasmuch as they are all equally seduced by a sensual pursuit after earthly objects, which their reason yet daily proves to be unworthy of their care. On this account, as being led by one general principle, they partake variously in different kinds and degrees of each others character; and though, on the other hand, as individual votaries of vice, by distinct combinations of habit, temper, and circumstances, they vary almost infinitely from each other, yet they are justly comprehended in this great division in opposition to the reasonable, or, as under the Gospel-State they are eminently entitled to be called, the Spiritual part of mankind. Thus for instance, the epistle of St. Jude describes them, after having specified the several crimes to which ambition, avarice, and voluptuousness excite,

“ These are murmurers, complainers, walking
“ after their own lusts, and their mouth speak-
“ ing great swelling words, having men’s persons
“ in admiration because of advantage. But,
“ beloved, remember ye the words which were
“ spoken before of the Apostles of our Lord
“ Jesus Christ, how that they had told you
“ there should be mockers in the last time, who
“ should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

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“ These

“ These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.” And thus also in other places the sacred writers charge all faction and Heresy to the same principle: “ Ye are carnal,” says St. Paul to the Corinthians; “ for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?” so lastly, in his epistle to the Galatians, among the works of the flesh “ Heresies” are expressly named.

To these arguments and authorities shewing that Moral Prejudice is the true cause of Heresy, I mean of Heresy as it is represented in Scripture, * concerning which I hope to be always understood to speak, properly succeeds the consideration how it produceth this effect. The manner of this process is plainly assignable. It is the common case of prejudice in general. For all partiality, however entertained, has the power of engaging the mind to bestow its attention on the merits and pretensions of those doctrines to which it is attached. Withdrawing itself therefore from the contemplation of the arguments on the other part of the question, the understanding soon ceases to judge of both by an equal or indeed by any comparison, becomes entirely posses-

* This representation occurs chiefly in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, in the general epistles, and in the Apocalypse.

fed by those on its own side, and is at length, or often perhaps quickly and immediately, convinced by those to which it has solely attended.

If we then consider the above statement, we shall be enabled, without either difficulty or mistake, to foresee the shape of those proceedings which this Scriptural Heresy fashions for itself. Derived from such a cause, guarded by such a conformation, and forwarded by such powers, it will be first erroneous, then violent, clamorous, and hurtful to society, and, finally, will be obstinate.* It has been shewn not to be open to conviction from the plainest exposition of the plainest truths; and it is equally ill-disposed to peace as to truth. It rushes into faction through the blindness and violence of its passions, and being instigated by mutual arguments and encouragement,† is there soon fermented into acrimony and uncharitableness. And as in the ordinary course of affairs, the spiritual concerns of Religion are farther in all ages more or less connected with temporal advantages, abundant force is thence added to the animosity of party spirit. And thus the Heretic, by a process of every kind of opposition, doctrinal and political, becomes every day more and more incapable of acknowledging his error, through the natural

* See James iii. 13,—17.

† 2 Tim. iii. 13.

tendency of every inclination and habit to advance toward perfection, particularly of those that are evil; by resentment, by shame, and interest; and, at length also, which is naturally to be expected, by that self delusion, the result of repeated hypocritical attempts to delude others.*

Two things observable of Heresy are to be inferred from this review of its character. First, it is far from being a matter indifferent in itself; inasmuch as it is the offspring of a bad stock, issuing out of the same corruption of heart, from whence the Scriptures have deduced along with it every vice that dishonours God, and is mischievous to man.† It is therefore justly odious, worthy of the sentence of the divine wrath; and as such has been in the severest manner condemned by the Apostles,§ whose reprobation of it our Church, as it hath been shewn, with the strictest propriety follows in her adoption of the Athanasian Creed.

Secondly, as Heresy is wicked, so is it also in itself contemptible. For wickedness, as it abuses the understanding, is ever the parent of folly. It is therefore no wonder if the passions

* 1 Tim. iv. 2.

† Gal. v. 20, 21.

§ Tit. iii. 10, 11. 2 Pet. and Jude, at large. 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5, 20, 21.

that

that give rise and maintenance to it, lead its votaries, as has been remarked, to opinions absurd, to positions wide of the truth of Scripture, contrary to its plain tenor or its express declarations, to the early and constant acceptance of it, to clear reason, even to common sense and experience in the ordinary concerns of life; to tenets also contradictory of each other under every opposite and disagreeing shape that an active and lawless fancy can invent. And if these principles of error, thus called out by animosity, and excited by prospects of worldly advantage, be farther inflamed to the utmost by detection of their ignorant and false pretences, it is hard to conceive to what extreme of perverseness and folly they may not be driven.

We may also, from the above view of its origin and means of existence, conclude with the Apostle in the assertion of my text, that Heresy will never cease from the world. While both these remain as they are, there always will be, under every constitution of every Church, for there always must be, Heresies.

But it farther remains for us to consider that, unhappily for the interests of mankind, while they do exist, they are as dangerous as they are

odious and contemptible in themselves. In the hands of those professors of religious knowledge who have been described, they assume shapes, and are introduced with arts which deceive the Apprehension, and seduce the Inclinations of the plain Believer. It would be difficult or rather impossible to represent all the stratagems which fraud can adopt in any public concern, but more particularly in the most important one of Theology. This will forcibly strike those who consider its particular circumstances. For first, the peculiar difficulties, as before represented, give opportunity for such misrepresentation of fact and sophistry of reasoning as but few can detect, and therefore others can have no chance of not being perplexed by, or of not being entirely seduced and misled. Especially are these deceits mischievous, if the refutation of them at any time is dissembled; if they are imposed on the world with an air of unquestioned victory and triumph; if the topics selected and the modes of treating them are those which coincide with the taste and humour of any age or country, whether it incline to open freedom of enquiry, or dependence on received opinions; whether it affect to reduce every religious subject to an ideal simplicity, or to involve it in the folds of complex learning, By this artifice, unworthy of the honest friend to truth, in the first case, Liberality of Sentiment is made the mask of an unprincipled

principled Licentiousness of Opinion, and plain Sense is the name of shameful Ignorance: in the second, Deference to superior Wisdom is the cloak of servile Submission, and Learning of insidious Sophistry.

An inferior party stimulated by the motives which Heresy supplies, has also some not inconsiderable advantages against an established Church. As naturally more active, it can ascribe to itself a greater principle of pious Zeal, and a religious Disinterestedness of conduct; which, if her followers were once arrived at the completion of their wishes, would sink far beneath the level of that Indolence and that Corruption, too natural to human Frailty, or common to the degeneracy of the age, against which they loudly and vehemently declaim.

If we consider the importance of Religion in the eyes of all serious persons, it must be readily perceived how strong an impression such specious pretences will naturally make on their minds. Their feelings on so great and fearful a matter render them easy to be deceived. Even alarm and suspicion here are dangerous, while to create them is no difficult task to a dishonest artifice. Bold and confident assertions with some plausible appearance of argument may do this successfully, and, like the declamations of an Empiric, will

lead men, especially those who are weak, to mistrust and condemn the sober language of true and real knowledge. It is surely easy to remark on those defects which every Establishment, as a human work, must have, and to aggrandize them into serious and important blemishes; or indeed, to make those parts which are not at all faulty appear so, by a misstatement or partial representation of the doctrines or facts on which they are built. On the other hand these separatists contend on no equal footing. They bring little or nothing into view which by becoming an object of censure, or being placed in competition with the established Church, might justify the transcendent merit of this latter by comparison. Separated daily into almost numberless parties, and perpetually changing their exterior forms as well as interior doctrines, they elude all public notice, if they do not on other accounts appear unworthy of it. Their champions hence are individuals, delegated by no community, often also obscure and of little account as Theologists. Their opinions therefore are often unnoticed as below regard; or the refutation of them is, as it were, without a mark, and the blame and disgrace following it, attaches to no party or description of men, all disowning the doctrines which they become unable publickly to defend. So that the cause of truth, like the character of an illustrious and good man, is alone liable

liable to attack, while it is either not worth his care, or is a vain labour to direct his aim against the unknown and nameless enemies that molest him on every side.

It may not be amiss here to remark, that the two great rocks on which sincere men are apt to be shipwrecked by these deceitful pilots, are, first, those subjects which for ever must mislead, because, for some of the reasons before assigned, they are beyond the reach of their ability; and secondly, on the other hand, subtle and trifling particulars, such as those respecting ceremonies, wherein there is an equal danger of error in bestowing any serious consideration, though for a different reason. People here seek in vain to make a conscientious distinction, where the nature of things has made none, or, at most, where any evil tendency of the practice they reason against, is unavoidable from the mere imperfection of the present state, and may farther be prevented by caution, or is counteracted by other things of a contrary efficacy. This may be considered as fighting against unsubstantial and scarcely perceptible shadows, where there is no firm hold for the mind, which on every opposition from without, or on every change itself undergoes, loses the imaginary impression it had received, and sees the fantastic forms

forms of truth it had framed, vanish into nothing.

But still more dangerous to truth and virtue are these deceivers, when they engage the lusts of the Heart as well as the weakness and ignorance of the Understanding on the side and party of error. When this is done, as too easily it may, the delusion is indeed firmly rooted, and its influence compleatly pernicious. This, as Religion with all its Establishments is irreconcilable to any vicious desires, and yet is of too fearful moment to flight or reject, is always effected by Misrepresentation of the doctrines maintained: and this again is easily accomplished by an abuse of names and words, or of texts of Scripture, and other books of credit. In the first, as it has been shewn, they may recommend under the specious appellation of virtues, as Zeal, Sincerity, and such like, habits and practices which are entirely different from such excellent qualities: and in the second, they may produce single passages detached from their context, and that true sense, which the character, circumstances, and scope of argument of the author are generally alone able to fix and determine. But it is indeed a more material calamity to deplore, that, too often, people may have already rendered themselves liable to suffer the delusion
which

which misleads them. They have perhaps prepared themselves to seek a sanction in Scripture for gratifying those inclinations, to which their temper or circumstances particularly subject them; and therefore are too ready to join those teachers, who pretend to have found it against every thing that discourages such indulgence. But farther, beside the allurements of Preeminence, Pleasure, or Interest, the common infirmities of our nature afford an aim to the enemies of truth. The Desire of Novelty, Curiosity, the Expectation of Perfection under another form of establishment, and such other natural principles, not to detail also the peculiar infirmities of Individuals, are instruments in the hands of those who seek to beguile; and, though after a similar manner as in other publick or private concerns of life, yet with greater advantage in Religion.

By these and means like to these therefore, which are worthy of our serious reflection, has Prejudice, Moral Prejudice, been able to raise and support even the most violent ill founded oppositions against the Church of Christ. In the Apostolic times it led men to “the denial of the Lord who bought them,”* to the adoption of Fables and Genealogies,† to the

* 2 Pet. ii. 1.

† 1 Tim. i. 4. Tit. i. 14.

imposition

imposition of Jewish Ceremonies,* to a denial of the Resurrection,† to the worship of Angels,‡ to the obligation of unnatural Restraints,§ to opposition against Dignities and Government civil and ecclesiastical,|| to Contests for party-pre-eminence,** and to Heresy in general.†† And if then to the dangers which, it has been shewn, follow the promulgation of the most irrational and pernicious errors, when introduced by the imposing subtleties of deceit, and made subservient to the interests of our passions, be farther added the consideration, that Heresies must alway abound, as long as the nature of men and things continues to be the same, it remains for us to be aware how much we are concerned in this representation. On this topic it is no part of my present design to enter. I here leave the subject; which as often as it may be necessary to pursue farther, as it requires freedom and resolution, so does it particularly exact candour, circumspection, and charity. I shall only add, that we are more highly and immediately concerned to consider, what Motives and Means we are furnished with to secure ourselves against the evils that surround us,

* Gal. v. 1, &c.

† 2 Tim. ii. 18. 1 Cor. xv. 12.

‡ Col. ii. 18.

§ 1 Tim. iv. 1, &c.

|| Tit. iii. 1, &c.

2 Cor. xiii. 1, &c. 3 Joh. 9, &c. 1 Cor. iv. 19.

** 1 Cor.

i. 11. and iii. 3.

†† Gal. v. 19, 20,

S E R M O N VIII.

I THES. II. 15.

*Therefore, Brethren, stand fast, and hold
the Traditions which ye have been
taught.*

IT is, I think, needless to spend any time in proving that the Traditions here mentioned, were simply the Doctrines of the Gospel in opposition to the delusion of those, “ who believed “ not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” It rather concerns us to observe the reasoning pursued by the Apostle. Because on one hand the heresies thus described seduced unto eternal ruin, and on the other a sincere adherence to the truth led unto salvation, and the attainment of “ the glory of our Lord Jesus “ Christ,” therefore his disciples ought to “ stand “ fast, and hold the Traditions which they had “ been taught, whether by word or by epistle.”

It

It is precisely the same argument on which at this era of the Christian Church we claim an adherence to the same Gospel, and to those Establishments which are builded on its authority, and are agreeable to its nature.

That the Gospel we preach is the Word of God, and that the Institutions of the Church of England, doctrinal and ceremonial, are not unworthy of it, we have, I hope, seen some reason to believe in the foregoing discourses.

We have seen, first, that Faith is a necessary and successful principle of Knowledge, and likewise, secondly, a necessary and beneficial principle of Conduct: that, if it be not our own fault, it is a safe and applicable principle in matters important to our welfare, and that in many instances it is productive of a certainty as high and satisfactory as the deductions of science: that the proof of the Authenticity and Authority, from external evidence, of the canonical books of Scripture, depending on this principle, possesses this full certainty: that though the internal evidence be not strictly necessary, or always a safe and expedient criterion of truth, yet it is also to a great extent useful and undeniable: that the Articles of Faith, of Morality, and of the Oeconomy of the Gospel, are clear of all exception; which is shewn at large in some instances

stances of each that have been most disputed : and, lastly, that the Christian Faith is recommended to us by the necessity and use of it to our Religion and Morality, the effects which it tends to produce, and the glorious reward which it enables us to obtain.

We have seen also that the necessity and divine authority of Government are applicable to religious Establishments : that those articles in them which concern the conscience, because indispensably enjoined by the law of God, are very few, and easily conspire with the various systems of civil authority : that, beyond these, the fashion and mode of religious discipline in every particular are the concern of the government in each country : that Confessions, and Articles of communion are the justifiable fences of religious and civil peace, being necessarily adopted against the return of evils injurious to both : that in particular, on this account, if rightly perused, the Creed under the name of Athanasius is necessary, and is consistent with truth and charity : that for these and such like reasons, the Liturgy and Discipline of our Church must be complied with, notwithstanding all imperfections and improprieties, if nothing positively wicked can be discovered, which is not the case.

Lastly,

Lastly, we have seen that Heresy is no argument of fault in any Church, since it obtained against the Churches of the Apostles themselves, as it likewise did against all the primitive Churches; and because it necessarily exists in all times: that it is distinguishable from the mistakes of sincere men: that it is the offspring of immoral prejudice, and becomes on account of such a cause at once contemptible, odious, and yet dangerous.

From all that has been hitherto said, the position with which we began, seems to be confirmed, that truth in all questions essential to the welfare of man is attainable by him. It is acquired by a sincere and careful pursuit of it, assisted by the information and advice of others. It is at least in concerns of Religion the effect of Virtue, being the result of Sincerity and Humility, one of which leads to impartiality and diligence, the other to caution and deference unto superior wisdom. Under such guidance no man is liable to any mistake in reading the Scripture, that can endanger his eternal interest. The Evidences of Christianity are plain and undeniable; its Articles of Faith, as it hath been observed, are express and few in number; its Morality clear and easily comprehended. So palpable is this point, that scarcely any is more directly or frequently inculcated in the New Testament.

tament.* Truth is therein most justly represented as a Moral Duty, a “Fruit of the Spirit:”† and thence it was that the Apostles exhorted and instructed their disciples to “walk by the same rule,‡ to speak the same thing.”§ It may therefore be finally stated, that the divisions of men against the truth of the Gospel and the Establishment of any Church conformable to it, by which the conduct of others has been perverted or embarrassed, in the Apostolic times and ever since, have arisen from persuasions and purposes at which no man can conscientiously arrive, being produced by an indulgence of an immoral temper and habit, or the prosecution of some sinister and immoral view.

It is worth our while to reflect a little on the three characters that have been shewed to belong to Heresy. As it is contemptible in the eyes of those who are able to judge of its pretensions, and is thence frequently without that answer which it does not deserve, or is treated with that disdain which is often due to it, an inconvenience hence arising is that it may boast to the world that it is unanswerable. As it is

* Among numberless other passages see Joh. viii. 44. Rom. ii. 8. 2 Cor. iv. 2, &c. Gal. ii. 14. 2 Thess. ii. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 18. James v. 19, 20. 1 Joh. i. 6.

† Eph. v. 9.

‡ Philipp. iii. 16.

§ 1 Cor. i. 10.

odious, and incurs the reproof of all friends to truth and virtue, deriving on itself that abhorrence which is consistent with Christian charity to the authors of it ; hence they may raise a clamour against the severity with which their principles and opinions are refuted and exposed, who yet have little right to complain if sometimes the just limits are exceeded, which they themselves perpetually transgress. As being dangerous it excites the concern of all who feel for the dearest interests of mankind, their individual eternal happiness, and the general peace, order, and prosperity of their temporal condition, the defence consequently adopted, gives room for Heresy, which subsists by misrepresentation of names and arguments, to call this which every man of plain sense and cool judgement cannot but see lawful and necessary, an injurious proceeding against those who separate from the doctrine and institutions of the Church.

Such therefore being the character of those people whom we have considered as coming within the Scriptural signification of Heretics; and distinguished from good men, I presume it may be safely concluded, that however specious their zeal, which is merely the ardour of an inferior party striving to overtake a greater, however plausible their almost exclusive pretensions to liberality of mind, true learning, and
disin-

disinterestedness, which are false and ridiculous, they are not entitled to credit; they have not the qualification of true Witnesses: neither Ability nor Integrity commend their Testimony to our Faith.

Leaving them therefore to the just consequences of their misconduct here, and finally to the judgment of Him who is the supreme head of his Church, who sees the operations of their hearts, and ascertaining the several degrees and shades of their guilt will reward them all proportionately to their deserts; let us, lamenting that any good man should be even for a moment deluded by their artifice, and carried away as far as honour and virtue suffer him; and much more, if he is blinded by zeal for a while to go farther, or his virtue and honor are shipwrecked in such a voyage; let us, heartily wishing for their conversion, turn our thoughts to the consideration of those Means and Motives which afford us security against such dangers.

After what has been said at length in the preceding discourses, it is only necessary to subjoin a few words by way of inference on each of these.

The Means therefore of guarding ourselves against herefy and all error are in our hands, the written Word of God. It is first our concern that we look to this for our principles and rules of conduct, abandoning that reliance on the vague and delusive speculations of human wisdom, or an appeal to the sentiments and feelings of an imperfect and corrupted nature, which are the boast but ought to be the shame of modern times, an idolatry of heart and tongue, far worse than those against the precepts of the Jewish law which so often brought down the vengeance of Heaven. His Providence hath now delivered a perfect system of instruction, which all, who in this country contemplate, will find, as far as is available for all the information they can need, plain and satisfactory. The conditions of deriving this knowledge from it, have been fully stated to be Sincerity and Humility: to persons possessed of which it is only necessary to add that they should peruse it with the same reasonable Freedom in ascertaining its true import, which good sense directs in the perusal of any other important book, attending to the design of the writer, and comparing one part with others that relate to the same matter.

It is also to be considered, that, in order to forward and secure this purpose, the same Divine Providence has appointed a perpetual Ministry

nistry of men, by whose labours this sacred volume is rendered accessible in the language of our own country, and by whose office also it is constantly recited, set forth, and vindicated from misrepresentation, even to those who cannot otherwise partake of it. Thus hath He graciously perfected the purpose of his mercy in giving to the world a Gospel which is “preached to the poor.”

The Motives which should make us careful to shun all danger of heresy are plainly the duty we owe to God, and to Man; to God as the author of our Faith, and the Founder of all Order and Government; to Men as Christians and Brethren, and as Members of Civil Society. In this Duty of course is necessarily involved our own Happiness temporal and eternal, deservedly forfeited if we neglect these motives. On this subject it will be pertinent to contemplate a little more particularly our excellent Establishment.

It has been, I trust, shewed in those instances of her Articles and Creeds which have been brought forward, that the Church of England has proceeded in the interpretation of Scripture with that simplicity and caution which are due to the Divine Oracles. These have enabled her to maintain the moderation and charity, have

supplied the prudence, and ensured the firmness, which by degrees accomplished the great work of a Reformation, probably as far as it was possible by the blessing of Heaven on human means to succeed in it.

I say by human means; and it is scarcely worth while to contend with those who will think or reason of ecclesiastical institutions in any other manner than as of matters of human skill and execution, or will not allow the consequences annexed to this consideration. For it is hence of plain necessity allowable that in its progress toward completion, and in its final constitution it will contain, without any disparagement to its character, that imperfection which every human work must possess. And this must appear more evident, if we consider the difficulties which such revolutions have always had to encounter. Examples of these abound every where in ecclesiastical history; and, to mention an instance that approaches nearest to our own concerns, the narrative of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, particularly, presents a great and copious display of them, and of their unavoidable effects. But in that department of it which we contemplate with so much gratitude in this country, the case is perhaps singularly instructive. In the hands of a pious and able Leader the cause of Religion had even for the
primary

primary agent and mover of this change an insincere and selfish Monarch, who yet was not, with any safety to it, to be offended. It had next all the Finesse, the secret Intrigues and Frauds to combat of the Professors of a most artful and powerful Church. It had Ignorance, Bigotry, and the Charms not only of a specious and splendid, but of an indulgent and sensual System, to eradicate from the minds of the higher and lower orders of people. It had also opposition from Papal Policy, and from the interference of foreign nations, as well as long Usage and Prescription at home, to overcome. But, more than all, it had the imperfect and yet unsettled Principles of Doctrine and Discipline among the Reformers themselves, their various Tempers also and Interest to reconcile, or at least to prevent from exciting a disunion and open rupture. The check on our illustrious Reformer and his Party during this Reign was continued in the minority of the succeeding Prince by the Intrigues of the Romish Party in the Court : and the progress of this work, like that of its exemplar the cause of the Gospel in the hands of the Apostles, was retarded by the obstacles thus laid in its way. Like that also, in the next period, it sealed the truth, and cemented the glorious fabrick which should endure and rise above all opposition, with the Blood of its great and faithful Advocates. On the return of happier

times, in its completion, the differences of interests and opinions among the leaders, the prejudices and weakness of a whole nation for so many centuries accustomed to the Romish Liturgies, a deference to the political exigencies of the Kingdom, and to the pleasure of that authority through which alone the whole was to receive its legal establishment; these incidents, I say, must of course have rendered it necessary that the system should be composed with such latitude, as, while it rejected every thing that was criminal and unsafe, might comprehend the differences of opinions subsisting between the several parties, and render the communion with it as accessible as was possible to all. Such a necessity of accommodation, among the many difficulties that attended this matter, is a sufficient answer to those who talk of a perfect form, or raise objections on those parts in any, that are unessential to the end and purpose of the whole. And indeed, to say no more on this topic, it is plain not only from the history of this and every church in every age, but also from the conduct of our Divine Saviour and his Apostles, that in all religious concerns, as we know it to be in all public temporal transactions, it is necessary to give way to the prejudices which it is out of our power to remove, and to become all things unto all men for the sake of all.

On such accounts we have every argument in the world, that can sway good and wise men, for adhering earnestly to the communion in which we are placed, not listening to the sleight of those who profess to reform, or threaten to destroy; who directing their efforts immediately against the Bulwarks and Fences of the Church, the Confession of a right Faith, and the Constitution of her Discipline and Privileges, would, if they might succeed, be then enabled to go on till they had blown up the whole Fabrick: who likewise, as if in order to wipe away every little remain of credit with the friends to truth, by their restless exertions tend to make unsafe or inexpedient those improvements which the change of circumstances, and the hand of time otherwise render practicable to the rulers of an Establishment; as unsafe and inexpedient, as for a pilot to loose his anchor in a storm. And on this account also, lastly, we should strengthen the hands which are appointed to preserve our Faith and our Tranquillity, the precious acquisition of the labours and blood of our great Ancestors, that we may without hindrance be able to beautify more and more the sacred pile which they have raised, and preserve it for our posterity the permanent object of increasing admiration to all nations,

If we were not indeed self-abused, or misled by the instruction which has been shewed to be both unnecessary and dangerous to all who are not professionally engaged in the science of Theology, the “instruction that causeth to err from “the words of knowledge,” it would be difficult to conceive from what quarter dissatisfaction can arise. If we treat religious concerns with as much reasonableness as sensible men do the common affairs of the world, with the sole difference of a care suitable to its dread importance, and admit the principle of contentment and gratitude in every instance where it is plainly, not to say eminently, proper, it is manifestly our part to be happy. Those who complain, as they well may, of the degeneracy of the age, ought to be sensible that this is universal in its influence, and has ever been in all countries, as History shews, the gradual consequence of natural causes. But if the particular channel along which at present it directs its course to overflow the world be enquired for, it must, I am persuaded, be observed that it is the absence of a Religious Principle, the neglect of the Holy Writings, the contempt of all Sacred Institutions, not to omit the want of a just Subordination to Civil Authority and its established Ordinances, on a pretext of freedom, simplicity, and liberality of sentiment. In fine, it must be acknowledged that, as formerly in the times of
bigotry

bigotry and superstition we were slaves to Tyranny in our opinions and conduct, so we now ought to fear lest, having past the line of religious and political wisdom, we, as human matters do usually thus proceed, rush onward toward the terrible extreme of Licentiousness and Anarchy.

In this country God grant that the day of such misery be far distant! And we have also reason to hope that he will defend us from it, when we contemplate the present state of things among us, and especially of our ecclesiastical concerns. We see a free and enlightened people satisfied with the enjoyment of a good and sincere Religion; sensible that a system of Faith and Practice which is wholly and carefully drawn from the word of God, is rightly adapted to secure every great purpose of the Revelation of the Gospel. And if these Scriptures are in the hands of all, it is obvious, especially in this age of general learning, that neither Superstition nor Enthusiasm, nor any delusion unfriendly to the happiness of man, can for any time escape detection. Hence it is that we venerate an Establishment, which containing all that is necessary and essential to Religion, conspires with the order and authority of Civil Government, exhibiting in this combination that harmony which evinces that both are the work of the same God,
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the Author of all good to his creatures. From such a circumstance it necessarily derives on the Gospel, which it sets forth, a general esteem and confidence, agreeable to the purpose of its Divine Author, because instrumental to the conviction of mankind. Contenting itself with that security and those means of subsistence, which the Legislature has piously bestowed, it seeks no separate authority, but blends all its Ministers in the general mass of Citizens. They teach that obedience unto Magistracy which is due from all men, as creatures of God and followers of Christ. They teach to Kings and Rulers that they hold their power in trust for effecting the happiness of their people, and that they must account to God for the performance of this duty. They exhort to that Charity which induces to think and hope well of the administration of all orders of men, that Contentment which prevents an unreasonable desire of change, and that Peaceableness which is averse to every infraction of publick tranquillity, without pleading for unmanly weakness or ruinous acquiescence: they also instruct in that Charity towards the adversaries of religious truth, which never imputes to any men those bad motives of heart which their conduct does not plainly evince, and in that Forbearance, which never permits to to step beyond those measures of self preservation which the safety of the Church renders necessary

cessary to persevere in. To secure the causes of happiness among us, they recommend Honesty and Diligence, the sources of publick and private wealth, and that Sobriety and Frugality which are necessarily assistant to preserve the enjoyment of it. They also dwell on the Relative Duties of private life, which further the labours, divide the cares, and heighten all the gratifications which opulence in this world presents to industry. And, lastly, as all these precepts are given because the temper and conduct they enjoin is a duty to God, they add to the happiness they thus ensure, the Consciousness of pleasing thereby the Father of all, and of being permitted to expect that Blessing from him, which is the glorious and unfading Crown, and as it were the Reward of their present prosperity. Thus does the Religion taught by them connect, according to the genuine plan of a wise, powerful, and benevolent God, temporal happiness with eternal, making one a preparation for the other.

As the Church of England is thus friendly and instrumental to these ends, so it is, at least in this place, pertinent to add that it is intimately connected with that which is valuable for the sake of all, the cause of useful Learning. This must, surely, tend to enhance its value in the sight of every discerning man. For consider
Learning

Learning in every view, and in all its several branches, it must appear a blessing on the same footing with every other advantage attainable by man, but indeed of all in this life the most excellent and precious. As an ornament to him, since it is the discovery of truth, and the advancement of the powers of his mind, the noblest part of his nature, it is far above an innocent one, it is, as it were, the only embellishment that is desirable and proper. As a matter of utility, let all the arts which preserve or comfort his being plead for it; while the wealth, which it teaches genius and application to collect, is directed, in its Disposal for the conveniencies and elegancies of life, to call forth the industry of man, and to encourage the train of private and social virtues that attend on industry, by the means which are thereby supplied of acquiring competence and contentment.

If it should be said that the general utility of learning is questionable, because, as it hath indeed been shewn, it is also a parent of error and deceit, such an objection is too obviously absurd to merit a refutation. Though greater abilities of mind in this life than what we do possess might be a dangerous gift to man, yet what are granted are therefore, as all other capacities, designed and framed to be instruments of good; and at the same time, like all others, to effect the
secondary

secondary purpose of proving our obedience in the use we make of them. And with this so evident a purpose of the Almighty who shall find fault, or argue from the abuse of Learning by wicked men, when such an argument would despoil human life of every blessing that supports and adorns it? It is also to be noticed, that, like other means of good, the right application of it avails to counteract the evils consequent on the abuse of it, and is alone able to do so. And, as things are so constituted in this world that false knowledge must necessarily exist, since our passions and lusts will call it out to effect their aims, true Learning must rise on the other hand to resist its attacks, and secure the interests of mankind:

And if in every concern of man Literature thus promotes his welfare, it must certainly be allowed necessary and advantageous to the cause of true Religion. For, in the first place, it alone exhibits to the sincere unlearned Christian the sure title and the doctrines of that Gospel, which was revealed at a remote period of time, in a distant country, and hid from his perception beneath a foreign and obsolete language. It stands at the very gate of the Temple, and by the hands of those who, in places dedicated to the service of God and their Country, are prepared for this office, delivers to men the truths by which they
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are saved. In these retreats is Science taught to become the handmaid of Religion. She there trains her followers in those pursuits which effect the improvement of their mental powers. Early subdued to caution, accuracy, and method, enriched with all the necessary means of information, and assisted by the wisdom of preceding ages, they are best enabled to arrive at just conclusions in their researches into every department of Theological Science. Far from rash or precarious proceedings, they are qualified to become the detectors of ignorance and of vain philosophy; against the first, demonstrating the authority, and ascertaining the true sense of the books of Divine Revelation; against the second, defining the limits between human knowledge and the ineffable mysteries which are seen only through the dark glass of Revelation, exhibiting them in their true simplicity, and guarding them from the profane intrusion and unavailing curiosity of unwise men. And it is evident from experience, especially in later times, that the greater the ability and application of minds thus instructed are, which are directed to these subjects, the greater will be our attainment of truth and preservation from error.

But neither is true Learning in any of those pursuits to which she calls us, an alien, or unassistant to the cause of Religion. For all the subjects

subjects about which human science can be conversant, must be the work of the hands of God, or the effects and consequence of his government. The study of the natural and of the moral world leads therefore necessarily to the discovery of those Attributes which command and inform our adoration and gratitude to the great Creator and Governor of the Universe. Lastly, the graces of human Learning give to the communication of religious truths the dignity, force and beauty of which they are capable, thus ensuring to them conviction, and conspiring with their native excellence to conciliate the veneration of mankind.

From the preceding statement then, we presume, it is to be inferred, that, by the present constitution of things, the Ministers of the Church of England are eminently and fully entitled to the confidence of those who are entrusted to their charge. No longer tempted, as before, by the splendors of civil preeminence to views inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel, their Integrity is now secured by principle, by the strongest incitements which external circumstances can furnish, the support and esteem which are now annexed to the soundness of their doctrine according to Scripture : while their Ability is recommended to our deference

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by every advantage, that the peculiar blessing of God on an excellent plan and the most liberal means of study can supply to human capacity and labour.

To conclude : thus do we see in this country Religion, or, as the Holy Writers justly denominate her, Wisdom,* appear like herself, in her true form and proper state ; as, in the language of the same Writers, the Daughter of the Most High, the supreme Object of delight and reverence.† Preceded by Science, accompanied by Honour and Wealth, the tribute and offering of national gratitude, invested in the decent robe of Ceremony, she comes, as not from Altars stained with Blood, so not from the frightful, solitary Desert, from the darker Cells of monastic Sloth, from the pathless Wilds of Enthusiasm, or from the sensual and sanguinary Triumphs of Arabian Imposture ; but moves in the Beauty of Holiness through a smiling Land, attended by every Virtue, by publick Order, Peace, and Prosperity, by private Liberty, Security, and Contentment ; and, lastly, by every Splendor and every Grace of publick and private life.

* Prov. viii. Eccl^{us}. xxiv.
xxiv. 3, 8, &c. Wisd. vii. 25, &c. ix. 4.

† Prov. viii. 24, &c. Eccl^{us}.

May the Almighty Disposer of events incline our hearts, and unite us all in the firm purpose of giving Stability to this Scene, and then, as far as we may be able, perfection to its constitution ; that having with one heart and voice glorified God here on earth, we may be all hereafter partakers of an everlasting union in Bliss and Glory through Jesus Christ our Lord !



A P P E N D I X.

LECT. IV. P. 90. " I speak here of those " celebrated words &c." I beg leave to submit here my reasons for this assertion somewhat more at length ; yet not pretending to compose a formal or complete defence of it, but rather offering them for the purpose of exciting others to attend to this and the passages similar to it in the New Testament. I shall begin with a review of the whole preceding conversation in this 8th chapter of St. John, which terminates in the solemn assertion before us.

The chief question of the whole, we are to observe, is concerning the nature of Christ, as appears from the beginning of the dialogue, ver. 12 &c. where his argument for the validity of his own single testimony respecting himself is, that he alone knew the place of his birth and

proper residence. On the mention of his Father, ver. 19, the Jews having asked where he was, he replies ~~“Ye neither know me nor my Father”~~ who we are. I am his Son (i.e. really and strictly so, for otherwise the reasoning seems inconclusive): and therefore if ye had known my nature, ye would consequently have known his, because the natures of a father and son are the same.* This topic of his nature, as implied by his place of residence, is resumed immediately afterwards, (v. 21.) from which he draws the conclusion, that the Jews, remaining ignorant of them, would die in their sins; sc. if they did not believe that *he was, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶμι*. This expression therefore, secondly, if we respect the force of the preceding assertions; which, I think, should determine its extent, cannot mean less than that he was the true divine Son of God, who came from heaven to save the world: i.e. immediately meaning that he was the Messiah; and, under that assertion, farther implying the truth concerning his divine nature: or meaning the whole truth together. For the phrase is singular, and implies some very high pretensions; and, I think, meant that pretension which he did not choose, as it was to no purpose and was improper, to declare more explicitly. The Jews therefore ask him, (v. 25.) “who art thou?” to which

* Such is also the true purport of Joh. xiv. 7—11.

the answer, "even the same that I said unto you from the beginning," leaves them in their wilful ignorance. The same assertion follows in the 28th verse, where *qui* refers to the same declaration concerning his divine nature, which is confirmed by the following words, "and that I do nothing of myself," &c. signifying that he acted not from any will of his own, but acted only through the communication of the Spirit without measure, which none but himself ever had, speaking and doing as this influenced him. It is true indeed that the Jews here still less understood the whole force of his words; for it appears that he had now changed his address to them, (from ver. 26) having broken off the former conversation at the words "I have many things" &c. And in consequence of the style next adopted, where he uses the phrase "Son of man," refers them to a future time at which they should be able to judge of his pretensions, whatever they were, and appeals to his holiness and goodness of life, thus recommending himself to their regard, (ver. 28—30) many of the Jews believed on him. These he then again tries to lead unto a higher notion of him than that of a Prophet which they had thus entertained; and begins by a promise of freedom, which gives him an opportunity of declaring himself to be as properly the Son of God,

as they professed to be his servants (ver. 35.)* At length, (ver. 51.) urged by their resistance to declare the whole truth more explicitly, he breaks out into a solemn assertion, which brings round the conversation to the same point from which it began. (ver. 12) The dialogue becomes now more warm and express on both sides. He next affirms that he is so far superior to Abraham that a great part of the happiness of the latter consisted in having seen his day; which, as the Jews understood it, implied his having seen Abraham. This appearing to be absurdity and falshood which they might lay hold of, they instantly taxed him with the effrontery of it; to which his reply is given with the form of a solemn asseveration, "Verily, verily I say unto you, "Before Abraham was, I am." The Jews at this declaration immediately took up stones to kill him.

If we allow this plain account of the whole conversation to be just, I do not see how we can, consistently with evident propriety, conceive this last assertion to be short of any preceding one, or rather not stronger and more express than any of them. And the behaviour of the Jews upon it seems evidently to point out that it amounted to blasphemy, as appears from the

* It will not be impertinent here to remark that between verses 34 and 35, there seems to be an ellipsis of such a sentence as, "ye then are servants."

parallel instances in x. 30—39. Mar. xiv. 63. So far as to the context, whence the conclusion is, that an eternal existence is certainly meant by the passage.

Let us next view the text itself alone, remarking first that the assertion necessarily respects the single point of *existence*, in answer to the plain question, how it was possible that Christ should have seen Abraham, when he was not yet fifty years old. The words are, *πρὸ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ γινώσθαι, ἐγὼ ἔμην*, which, as they affirm that he actually did exist before the time of Abraham, so I contend that they also appear on the face of the expression to contain the assertion of an eternal existence. The first argument I offer is on the difference of time in the words *γινώσθαι* and *ἔμην*. On this I presume that no instance can be produced from the New Testament, where the adoption of the present tense instead of the past, is parallel to this before us.

In this very chapter of St. John, two instances occur, sc. at v. 42 and v. 25. The first of these, *ἐξηλθὼν καὶ ἡκώ*, obviously shews the cause and reason of such an idiom in general, namely, that it imports *a continued duration from some former period to the present instant*. This, as the reader will observe, accounts for and explains the other text, *τὴν ἀρχὴν ὃ τί καὶ λαλῶ ὑμῖν*—as also another, which is perhaps the strongest example

ple that an objector can adduce, Joh. xv. 27.

αὐτὸν ἀφ' ὧν μετ' αὐτοῦ ἦν.

But I wish to point out a difference between these and the instance in question, on which I persuade myself that a great stress is to be laid. It is obvious that while in them the period, from which the continued duration begins, is *limited* and *assigned*, in this it is *indefinite*. "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" From which particular, the words, "I am," convey, I think, plainly a notion of Existence, sublime above all other instances, and of peculiar significance, as it is also capable of an extension beyond *all* determinable bounds, for he who thus existed before Abraham, might well be supposed to have existed also before any other creature; and this is a Scriptural assertion of an *eternal* existence. But more of this presently.

Again; I believe that no reader's attention is not arrested by the difference between the words *γεννηθῆναι* and *εἶναι*, especially as they occur in this place. The one, we know, properly signifies the generation of a being not existent before: the other is simple and positive, applicable to a being without any respect of beginning or end, but merely of its having existence. The one therefore properly belongs to beings who, as they are born or generated, must also die and perish; the other may be used in the case of a
being

being that is eternal. And though, from the nature and custom of languages, those terms may be sometimes or frequently used for each other, as they are, without preserving this distinction, yet I apprehend that in a sentence under the circumstances of the present, solely on the subject of existence, ushered in also by so solemn a preface, and after the discourse that had passed, where both words are used together and contrasted with each other, it is just to suppose that the genuine and obvious distinction between them was attended to and designed.

It is presumed that the difference in the use of *ego* here and at ver. 24 and 28 is already clear and indisputable, on account of the objects to which they severally refer, the one to the *existence*, the others to the *nature* of the speaker.

In consequence of such reasoning as the above I apprehend it is that the divines of our Church have looked on the words *ego ego* as designed to allude to the sacred appellation given to himself in Exodus iii. 14. by the Supreme Being, especially as they were spoken to Jews, and, what is more, to the scribes, interpreters of the law.

Whether they are right in this supposition, substantially I mean, (for as to the proof of its being a formal reference to that single text I do not

not conceive it worth while to contend) will, I trust, farther clearly appear from the following consideration.

We believe from the Scriptures and from reason that the Almighty is an *eternal* and self-existent being. But it is to be noticed that the manner in which the Scriptures express this eternity is suitable to that condescension which adapts all the mysteries of Heaven to the familiar, habitual ideas of man, as, I hope, in these Lectures has been sufficiently shewn. There are indeed a few sublime passages in Holy Writ that seem to surpass this mode of expression, where he is called "the God that inhabiteth eternity," "whose goings are from eternity," and such like. But these phrases belong to the enthusiasm of eastern poetry, and are therefore to be put out of the present question. They are introduced to elevate the heart, rather than to inform the understanding. The mind can form no positive idea of Eternity; it can only act by comparison with the duration of things present to the senses, in other words, with Time; conceiving of it that it is infinite, or still beyond any amount that a series of years or ages, or any combination of such series can produce. Hence then it is that the sacred writings usually adapt their representation of this great point to such *comparative* conception of the mind, and speak of the Supreme

preme Being only as existing *before* all things, and enduring without end. "I am," saith he to Moses, "that I am," or, as some versions give us to understand it, "I am he that shall be." "I am the first and with the last;" "I am Alpha and Omega;" "He that was, and is, and is to come."

This manner of speaking appears therefore, from what has been observed, to be so far reasonable and just as it is a necessary condescension to our weakness. It is farther also to be remarked that it is solely proper when used concerning the existence of the Deity, and applicable without mistake to Him alone. The reason of this is that he stands alone in this predicament of time or duration of existence distinguished from all other beings. They all are created by Him. Hence it follows that He is sufficiently and adequately pointed out, when he is declared to have been *prior* to all of them. And this way of describing Him, while it is nearer to the concerns and occurrences of human life, and, as it were, applicable to our ordinary apprehension and feelings, and therefore, because more useful to us, more usual, as hath been observed, yet it is an implicit and virtual expression of the sublimest truths concerning Him which the Scriptures any where express. I refer the reader to the following instances of this language
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in the Scriptures, which are such as most readily occurred: Pf. xviii. 45, 46. xciii. 2. cii. 24--28. Job xii. 12. comp. with Dan. vii. 9, 13, 22.

With the above considerations, added to those before mentioned, I shall, after producing one quotation more, on account of its obviously exact parallelism, leave the point to the determination of the reader. The 2d verse of Pf. xc. is thus exhibited in the LXX Version: *πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος ἦν ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πλασθεὶς τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν ἀβύσσον, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ὄντος ἐστὶν τὸ πᾶν ὅτι ἐστίν.* And I leave it with the hope that, however imperfectly discussed, as much might be added, yet, if it should have been rendered plain, the cavil of those will hence also appear ill founded, who assert that in this place we rest our Faith in this article of our Lord's divinity on the subtleties of grammatical construction. For, I trust, he will see that the argument is built on the broadest and most obvious construction: and whoever thinks this is not to decide for him, and oblige him to the reception of an article of faith, leaves no room or use for language. He will likewise, I trust, see that this is not all, and that the other considerations connected with it may lead any sensible reader without hesitation to the same apprehension.

I think it, however, improper to conclude this note without one remark which forces itself on my attention, and may be considered as a corollary; namely, that we are furnished with a direct and unavoidable proof of our Lord's divinity from his assumption of this attribute of eternity in the Revelation of St. John. I shall not trespass any longer on the reader, than to refer him to c. i. 8. comp. with ver. 11, 12, 13, 17, 18. c. iv. 8, 9, 10. c. x. 6. and c. xxi. 6. comp. with xxii. 13. where, as appears also from ver. 16. the speaker is Christ, probably from ver. 10. or 12.

LECT. IV. P. 102. "For whether we can, always," &c. To this place I have also reserved a fuller answer to those who ask, "Of what use is the doctrine of the Trinity, and other points like it, on which we so much insist?" We reply, "much every way." It teaches us first, as hath been intimated, who are entitled to our adoration; and by denying a plurality of Gods keeps us also from idolatry, and from consequences which are, surely, far worse than some persons seem to be aware of. But may we not, in the second place, ask, is it of no weight, or has it no moral influence on our minds to believe the Divinity of our blessed Saviour? to know that the man Christ Jesus who died on the cross to redeem

redeem us, " was in the beginning with God, " and was God?" that he " by whom the world " was made," who was " the brightness of " God's glory and the express image of his person, and upholdeth all things by the word of " his power," " made himself of no reputation, " took upon himself the form of a servant, and " being found in fashion as a man, humbled " himself and became obedient unto death, even " the death of the cross," to deliver us from sin and eternal death ; may we not ask, has all this no moral tendency ? Is it not the assurance of the love of God to us, beyond all other possible testimonies of it ? and an argument for our love to God and to our Christian brethren, nay, to all men as the creatures of God ? If common sense did not tell us so, our Saviour and his beloved Disciple tell us that it is. Is it not thence justly argued, not only " that at the " name of Jesus every knee should bow," but that on these accounts we should " work out " our salvation with fear and trembling?" that we ought to give " more earnest heed to the " things which we have heard," lest we should not escape, whoever receive so great a salvation in vain ? that also, seeing we have so great " a " High Priest that is passed into the heavens, " Jesus the Son of God," yet withal a High Priest who must be conceived to be thoroughly touched with a sense of our infirmities, we should hold

hold fast our profession, since “ we may come
“ boldly to the throne of grace, in order to ob-
“ tain mercy and to find grace to help in the
“ time of need ? ” May we not, lastly, ask, if
these are the inferences drawn expressly and at
length in the New Testament, by what name
shall we call the blindness of those who con-
tend against these doctrines of our Church as
vain immaterial speculations ? Phil. ii. 7. &c.
Heb. i. 2, &c. ii. 1, &c. iv. 14. &c.

In asserting and contending for these and such
articles, the Church which acts in exact imita-
tion of her founder and the inspired teachers of
“ the faith delivered to the saints ” does, as it
might be expected from such a rule of procedure,
act with the truest and most perfect wisdom.
Indeed, in all her measures, as I hope it does in
some degree appear from the foregoing discourses,
she makes her appeal as to the true and plain
sense of revelation, so also to the common sense,
natural feelings, and the experience of men in
the ordinary affairs of this life. Had not, beside
the personal insufficiency of her advocate added to
the shortness of the time prescribed for the compo-
sition of these Lectures, the necessity of concise-
ness in treating of so large a subject detracted too
much from its merit, I am fully confident that
such an appeal would have been placed beyond
all doubt. If things are then thus constituted,
how can any sober mind bear the idea of giving

up the present establishment of religion among us, and throwing all again into a wild chaos and heap of confusion? or, by surrendering any one of the fences that protect us against an attack, under a pretence of peace by such cession, both invite an assault hereafter, and render it more effectual? For, surely, it is plain to all, that this would in the common course of things be the consequence; as also farther, that no one or more concessions to the ignorance and prejudices of any men would avail to the satisfaction of a whole community, wherein there must be members of all kinds of temper, and every variety of opinion that can be entertained. It is obvious that a plan of accommodation begun on this ground could have no other end than in the demolition of the whole of that excellent structure, which is the pride of this country, and the admiration of others; a consideration that calls for the fervent wish and prayer of every honest and prudent man amongst us, in the words of the expiring Patriot,* *Esto perpetua!*

* Father Paul. See his Life, prefixed to Courayer's Translation of his History.

T H E E N D.

- P. 48. l. 26. *for* derived, *read* derived.
P. 60. l. 26, 27. *for* ~~themselve~~ *read* themselves
P. 69. l. 8. *for* Accuracy *read* Authority
P. 142. l. 14. *dele* are
P. 146. l. 8. *for* man :--- *read* man.
P. 152. l. 16. *for* by the Presbytery *read* of the Presbytery
P. 157. l. 11, 12. grave, correct. *roman*, *not italic*.
P. 160. l. 18. *for* them, chiefly *read* them, chiefly,
P. 168. *dele* * See note, p. 13.
P. 173. l. 23. *for* informs *read* informs us
P. 182. l. 17. *for* men *read* man
P. 183. l. 18. *for* points, *read* points
P. 203. l. 6. *for* found it *read* found it,
P. 215. l. 17. *for* Interest *read* Interests

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